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BLAZBLUE —ブレイブルー—
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著：梅原裕一

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西暦2106年。世界が「黒き獣」の脅威に怯えていた時代。魔道協会が治める島「イシャナ」で平凡な日々を送る学生・カズマがユウキ＝テルミと出会う時、歴史は新たな転換を迎える。
「自」をテーマにされれば、テメェはなにもかも取り戻せる。失ったものも、忘れちまったものも、なにもかも」
それは破滅への序曲か、それとも救いの始まりか――。
光と闇の狭間で「希望」と「絶望」が交錯する「BLAZBLUE」完全公式ストーリー、新章開幕！

DRAGON BOOK

★STEINS;GATE　シュタインズ・ゲート
円環連絡のウロボロス①
円環連絡のウロボロス②
比翼連理のアンダーリン①

★BLAZBLUE　ブレイブルー
フェイズ0
フェイズシフト1

★GOD EATER
～アリサ・イン・アンダーワールド～
～ノッキン・オン・ヘブンズドア～

★Gideon　ギデオン
The man whom God disliked

★キャサリン

★コープスパーティー
Book of Shadows

★モンスター・コレクション・サモナーズ
アルフレアの不死鳥
ソラステルの堕天使

カズマ以外誰もいない、いるはずのない部屋に……
知らない人物がいた。
「《蒼》に興味あるか？」
BLAZBLUE
PHASE SHIFT 1

そろそろ死んどけや、
このクソ猫がぁぁぁぁぁっ！
「――ウロボロス!!」

Prologue

The sounds of several people's footsteps were advancing in the long, dark corridor.

Within the darkness, they passed through ten heavy doors

that had been built. One by one, they opened the doors with their hands as they walked.

Each time a door was opened, the darkness that was filling the surroundings grew thicker. Their feet should have been stepping on the solid floor of the corridor, but there was an illusion as if their feet were going to a deep, deep bottomless abyss.

The figure that had been leading halted her feet.

A light sphere which was as big as a clenched fist was floating on air. The pale white light illuminated the vicinity. The light, which was created by using magic, shone on a door that was previously covered in darkness.

It was a wooden door. It was quite simple, different from the doors they had passed up until now. It was far from strong.

There was a magic circle drawn on the door.

"...Here, eh."

Near the door, the figure who made the light and had been leading, muttered an affirmation.

It was a slender and tall woman who had a glamorous appearance. Still in her youth, the firm legs which were extending from the short skirt were beautiful. With long hair flowing on her back, there was a big triangular hat like a witch from fairy tale would have placed on her head. She was called Nine.

"A wooden door with a sealing magic circle... It indeed feels secure."

Since the wood was really old, it had good affinity with magic. It helped strengthen the magic.

Even though it looked fragile, in reality, it protected its inside more stubbornly compared to the doors they had passed so far.

"Naturally... Something with that extent exists inside."

Behind Nine, a low voice groaned.

It was a tall man in his prime age. The long hair on his back was tied up. His body was dressed up in formal clothes. However, the body shape that arose on his first-rate shirt suggested that his body had been trained to fight. His name was Valkenhayn.

"While Clavis-sama was still alive, he personally sealed this place. It is not something that can be disengaged easily, even by the Ten Sages of the Mage's Guild."

"Are you testing me? Well, that's fine."

"Don't be so belligerent, Nine. Be careful."

Glaring at Nine, the nearby third figure reprimanded her.

In contrast to Valkenhayn, the person had a build so small even compared to Nine. No, the silhouette was not of a human. The sticking out triangular ears on the upper side of his head, limbs which depicted a lenient curve, the swaying and shaking tail that branched into two on his back.

The name was Jubei, a beastkin warrior who was formerly called as Mitsuyoshi.

"*That* Clavis had made the seal to be this strong. Keep that in mind."

"...I know."

After she answered Jubei's words with a low tone, Nine turned

around to face the door as if challenging it.

The airspace, and also the seal. Nine, Jubei, and Valkenhayn knew the man who created those.

Clavis Alucard. A vampire who had lived no less than a thousand years, continuously watching over the history of mankind.

He was no longer here. He had died a little while ago.

Just before that, he had stated his will to the butler Valkenhayn.

He had said... if a magician called Nine visits this seal, and also if she requires the content of the seal, guide her to this place and let her do as she pleases.

Nine entrusted the magic light to Valkenhayn. Then she held up both of her hands to the magic circle.

The seal slowly unraveled, as if melting.

After a little while, the magic circle that had emerged disappeared as if it was burning down.

Nine unhesitatingly opened the door.

Ahead was a completely plain small room. The floor, ceiling, and walls are made of old wood. Its purpose was to reinforce another seal inside the room.

"Nine."

As if holding back Nine who had took a step into the room, Jubei let out a cautious voice.

Nine halted her feet, but didn't look back.

"I'm fine alone. Rather, it'll be a hindrance to my magic if there's a lot of people."

"...If somethin' happened, quickly notify us. Okay?"

Even if he had faith her, he still had a worry. Leaving behind such a voice from Jubei, Nine shut the door.

Immediately, all the sounds faded away.

Disconnected from outside, that place looked like an isolated cage of wood that didn't belong to any kind of space.

Nine created a small light once again.

Lying in wait inside the darkness was a young man. He sat down on the floor, with both arms hanging on the wall.

When his appearance could be seen clearly, Nine' expression took a steep change. It by no means because of fear or she was being cautious. The fact that her gaze became sharp was because none other than pure anger.

"You are... *Yuuki Terumi*?"

Nine's voice was shivering with fury.

Struck by the magic light, the young man slowly raised his head while still inside the dark shadows.

His mouth smirked in the shape of crescent moon.

That moment, Nine raised her supple leg up high and sent a kick to the side of the young man's face who smiled eerily.

"This can't be... Don't mess with me! Why are you...!"

Giving herself to anger, Nine repeatedly kicked the head, cheek, and mouth of the young man.

The young man's head violently shook. His seemingly unhealthy pale skin split open. The cheeks and mouth were stained with red. His green hair got disordered.

A moment later, the young man's head crashed on to the wall behind him with a particularly loud noise.

With her chest went up and down as her breathing became ragged, Nine lowered down the high heels to the floor as if striking it. Then she brushed up the flowing long hair to her back since it was obstructing.

Looking at it, the restrained young man raised his completely wounded face and smiled. The countless wounds healed rapidly, and disappeared.

"Ooh, scary, scary. Don't you know a woman's hysteria is hated?"

"Don't talk pointlessly."

Toward the young man's smile which was full with mockery, Nine retorted with a sharp voice.

"...That's right. I don't have the time to waste talking with you. There's no time left for us after all."

"Time? Time, time, time, huh... Not that it got anything to do with me~."

"That's not the case."

Nine said it awfully strong,

The young man who was bound with magic stuck his chin out, exaggeratedly looked at Nine on purpose.

"Huh? Whoa whoa whoa, you awfully in a hurry, ain't you? How unusual~."

As if interrupting his words, a stiff noise rang out. It was the sound of Nine kicking Terumi's head.

"Didn't I say not to talk pointlessly? ...You trash."

Nine struck the floor with the sharp heel. The speaking mouth was trembling with boiled up anger and contempt.

"Yuuki Terumi. Lend your strength. For the sake of eradicating that monster."

With a quite sharp tone of voice, Nine directed her gaze to the young man who was referred as Yuuki Terumi.

The young man——Yuuki Terumi sneered.

"You asking me for help? That Nine of the Ten Sages? This seems serious... But you know, is that the kind of attitude to request a help from someone? You should at least kneel down first. Hihihi."

Again, the high heel kicked Terumi. This time was stronger, even when compared to the previous kicks.

"...You don't have the right to refuse."

"Ow ow... My head isn't a soccer ball..."

Cursing her, he spat at Nine's feet.

However, Terumi's provocative eyes that were raised immediately stiffened and opened wide.

Nine's thin finger was pointed at Terumi's forehead. The tip of her finger was shining with a cold purple light.

Terumi instantly understood the meaning of it.

"Mind EaterEnforced Restraint...!"

A magic to restrain soul and control over thoughts.

As Nine's voice spoke of inexplicable words, the light on her fingertip went inside Terumi's forehead.

"Tch... You bitch, do you think that sorry-ass magic can do anything to me!? Bullshit! Don't screw around!"

"We'll know soon enough."

"Hey hey hey. Tell me you're joking! Seriously, don't play tricks on me! Hey, you hear me, you damn bitch!?"

With his body furiously struggling, Terumi tried to escape from Nine's magic.

Yet the small but cold purple light mercilessly, in accordance to the user's hateful mental state, obstinately eating the target's brain and nerves deeply.

And then the light swallowed Terumi's white forehead completely.

...The small wooden cage became very quiet.

"...With this, it's over. That was disappointing."

As her mutter broke the silence, Nine released the magic that was binding Terumi. The sound of glass breaking rang out, and then it sucked into the darkness.

The powerless body of Terumi slanted forward. But still not falling, Terumi stood up with his head hanging. He was like a ghost without a purpose.

Confirming it, Nine frowned in her contempt. As he was detestable to look at, she turned back.

As the wooden door that had been closed was opened, Jubei

and Valkenhayn who were waiting outside instantly put themselves on guard.

"Did it go smoothly?"

Jubei asked.

Jerking her chin, Nine urged their eyes to look behind.

Beyond that was the figure of a tall young man standing dazed in the dim room. That was Nine's answer.

"I've obtained Yuuki Terumi. We no longer have business here."

Nine started walking away.

Jubei gave a tug to stop her.

"Is it really okay? Perhaps we're gettin' our hands on somethin' bad that we shouldn't get involved with."

"I've told you already. Power is essential for us. Unless that monster... Black Beast be annihilated at all costs, there won't be a future for the world."

For Nine, rather than a mission, it was more of a promise.

In order to fulfill the promise, this man's strength was needed.

"Regret is inevitable."

Cutting it off by saying it with all her determination, the high heels' noise resounded as Nine went back to the long corridor.

As if he was manipulated to be drawn to it, Terumi... the object called Terumi staggeringly went after her.

Following next was Jubei.

Last, it was Valkenhayn.

"Will this do... Clavis-sama?"

When he was about to leave, Valkenhayn turned around at the empty room with a stern expression. He deeply bowed his head to the previous head of the family who had just died.

It was an event which happened on the cold January of 2107 AD.

Chapter 1: Island of Green Wisdom

Part 1

...This is a dream.

He was aware of it since he was inside a scene he had never seen before.

That place appeared to be an absurdly high place. With the wind blowing fiercely, he stood on a stage-like circular place.

There was nothing on the surroundings. The only thing there was a black monolith which was so enormous that just looking up at it wouldn't be enough to see it fully. The monolith had blue veins that were like blood vessels and a crest shown on its surface. The object stood still without saying anything.

No, there was one more. Another person to be exact.

He didn't know how long the person had stood there, but a

young man stood while staring at this way.

The strong winds disturbed the young man's white hair and red jacket, rampaging them.

A large and broad sword was gripped in the hands of white-haired young man. The red and green eyes were glaring here with a sharp glint.

What were shown on his gaze were rage and hatred.

"I'll beat you to death!"

A thrown roar of anger.

The overflowing killing intent was thrusted without any hesitation. He was really... really glad that he saw it in a dream.

The 'he' inside the dream laughed.

"Ooh, oooh. You're finally in the mood!"

As his lips moving on his own, it flung a brutal mockery at the white-haired young man.

He understood. The young man before his eyes couldn't possibly compete with him. But even so, the pitiful cry of the puppy that could only oppose from the other side of him felt so, so pleasurable to hear.

"C'mon, lil' doggie! Get here so I can play with you!"

As if sliding, he spun the two knives on his hands at the same time and made clicking sounds.

Roaring with all his might, the white-haired young man ran in a straight line. The large sword his hands had been gripping on made a noise as it tore through the wind.

Dangerous——that was the thought of he who was watching the dream.

Simultaneously, the 'he' inside the dream let a high-pitched laugh out while feeling excitement and joy.

"Hey hey, what's wrong?! Hyaahahahaha!"

He didn't know 'who' was laughing.

Was it the he who felt scared of the white-haired young man's expression? Or was it the he who mocked that expression since it was laughable?

No, was it himself? Was it 'him'? Who was it?

From the bottom of the stomach, from inside the head, from an even deeper place. Something was swelling and breaking out. More and more. Along with the snake heads from the chain, a greedy hunger went to bite the young man.

"———!!"

The red and green pupils glared. They shouted the name of 'someone'.

Clad in the flame of darkness, the large sword swung. A pitch black arm was stretching. It was just like a lump of hatred.

"YES. HATE ME MORE. MORE, MOREMOREMOREMOREMOOOOORE!"

An inner voice was screaming in pleasure. No, it was 'his' voice. No, it was my voice. I don't know anymore. Since when it was me and Since when it was not me? Since when it was a dream and Since when it was not a dream?

I don't know. I don't know. Only greed grew larger, exploding from inside.

Scary. That's what I thought. The weak me just before I vanish.

With only his feeling, he seemed to be pulling himself off from the dream's scene, desperately closing his eyes.

Wake up. Quickly wake up. This is a dream. It's only a dream...

As his body was shivering with a sudden feeling of falling, the young man who had been sleeping until now woke up with a powerful jump.

His cheeks felt the warm light of day.

It was a peaceful morning.

From the square window near the bed, the thin sunlight was crowded between the curtains that weren't fully closed as if pushing them aside.

Below his body was a simple bed. The firm drawers of a desk used to study. A built-in closet. A certainly mass produced rag was laid on the floor.

Nothing's changed. It was the usual room, the usual morning.

His thought slowly starting to wake up from a dream to reality. Although he was in his own room, unconsciously catching his breath, the young man——Kazuma suddenly took a breath.

"It's a dream..."

He dropped his stiff shoulders and wiped his forehead. Covered with unpleasant sweats became droplets, the palm of his hands became wet.

His shoulder width was narrow. If someone had to say, he was a young man with a delicate body. With a pale skin that hardly got sunburn, he couldn't be regarded as strong by any standard. Rather than such words like sword and gun, or sport and stadium, he was more suited to words like book and library.

He, Kazuma Kuvaru, was a person with such appearance.

"Even so, it was a strange dream..."

Scratching his hair which was long enough to cover his eyes, Kazuma complained to no one.

No, was that really a dream?

A place which was so high that clouds were floating nearby. A circular stage. A standing-still black monument... A white-haired man.

On the contrary, the he in the dream absolutely didn't feel like himself. It was like he was reliving someone else's memory.

(But whose... Wait, who was it?)

He didn't have any idea. In the first place, even if it was based on his memory, Kazuma didn't have the knowledge that was needed.

Kazuma's memory had begun at the morning of a day seven years ago. He suddenly had slept above this bed before he realized it. That was the beginning of his memory.

He couldn't remember a single thing prior to that. How long

had he lived here? Where was he born? What kind of past did he have? He didn't know anything.

He only knew a little bit about himself.

He didn't know what kind of human relation he had with him, but under the guardianship of a man called Relius Clover, he was now attending the academy he enrolled. The financial aid was all that man's doing. And then during these seven years, he became aware of his preferences and nature, also his strong and weak points.

The kind of information that formed him was those things.

He didn't know about the roots he had born in, especially the prospect beyond this point.

Every day, he only spent time without a purpose. Sometimes, Kazuma thought that he was just like a dandelion seed that could do nothing but drifting on wind.

"...Hey, it's not the time to daze around. I'll be late if I don't quickly get ready."

The things he couldn't remember were just a usual thing. He had grown used to it. Rather than doing that, Kazuma fixed his hair which had been disordered by sleeping while getting down from the bed.

He opened the room's curtains which were closed halfway.

As the morning sun on the opposite side descended all at once, he saw a city spread out as if it was a painting.

White walls with green and blue roofs. The extending roads which had many irregular turns that became stone pavements. The roadside trees, which were cultivated to grow large, were full in deep green leaves.

He started living on this island seven years ago while not knowing anything. This city was the only world for Kazuma.

The rich nature. Buildings with beautiful exterior. It couldn't be seen from here, but there was ocean on the opposite side that sparkled as it was bathed in the light of day.

This place was an island floating on the ocean, *Ishana*. But outside the island, only a few referred it with that name. *Mage's Guild*. This island was called just like that.

Part 2

Ishana, or known as Mage's Guild, was a particular institution that didn't belong to any nation.

In this age when science and technology were being developed, this institution was the only one that specialized in magic and alchemy. For that very reason, there was no activity that made them stood out globally. But behind the scenes, they had connections with all kinds of nation, establishing a self-government that was neutral and completely independent from other countries.

A powerful barrier created by magic was spread around the whole island. It repelled any kind of slight interference from the outside. Furthermore as invasion from the outside was certain, a strict check would be performed when leaving from inside the island.

Therefore, Ishana, and also Mage's Guild, was said to be the safest city in the world.

Of course, there were all kinds of facilities in the island that provided the minimum needs. As the lifeline began, there were residences and companies, as well as vigilance committee and judicial system existing.

Above all that significant facilities, it was an educational institution.

There was a magnificent academy located on the center of the island. Under the control and management of Mage's Guild, it taught magic and alchemy in addition to basic education.

Behind the history where machinery and science continued to

evolve, sorcery and alchemy had been constantly handed down while concealing their presence. Passing down that vast knowledge and skills to the next generation was the biggest purpose of the academy.

There were dormitories in the academy. Living in dormitory was a requirement, with the exception of the students who lived in the island with their families.

Whatever the form, the students who had determined to live on the island commuted to the academy every day to make an effort to study and practice magic.

Kazuma was also one of the students of such academy.

But unfortunately, Kazuma didn't know why he attended this particular academy. Did he wish for it? Did his supposedly guardian enlist him?

When he noticed it, Kazuma had been registered as a student of the academy. As a dormitory room where he should be living in had been arranged, his school life begun after a week as if it was natural.

And while he was dumbfounded, no less than seven years of time had passed.

He already had been used to the academy's uniform which consisted of white tunic, black trouser, and short mantle which seemed to have the image of a magician.

(With random students like me able to wander around, the management here is surprisingly lenient.)

During the recess between classes, leaning against a window on the corridor that was wide open while looking outside, Kazuma complained when he thought about it.

He wondered if he shouldn't be thinking about trivial things like the lenient management.

Maybe it would be different if Kazuma were a popular and excellent student. Unfortunately, his grades were so-so. They were amazingly common.

In any case, he was grateful to be placed in this spot. It was because other people didn't have any expectation toward Kazuma.

(Memory... huh.)

Looking up at the clear sky, his mind faintly muttered.

Just like now, he sometimes wondered about it when he wasn't doing anything.

...He had forgotten something really important.

Of course, since he couldn't remember anything of his past, it should be obvious. However, he had a feeling like that there was something special, something that he must not forget. And it had to be remembered no matter what.

He had a feeling like that.

But... if felt a little scary.

What would become of him if he remembered the 'something that had to be remembered no matter what'? If the memory he desperately tried to remember would overturn the foundation of his current self, in that case, it would worth nothing

When that time came, what would be the best thing for him to do? In the first place, what would become of his current self when he regained his memories? Could he keep on being here as if there was no difference?

"...Well, it's not like it'll happen to me though."

Kazuma let out a small sigh as he spoke to himself.

Thinking about futile things made his head felt unpleasant. Giving up on thinking about it, he once again looked outside,

With only a few clouds on the sky, the soft sunlight was shining down. The weather was a nice today.

Regardless, Ishana always had fine weather.

Having a mild climate, the spring was warm enough to wake up and still be half-asleep at the same time. The autumn was fairly cold. No day hot enough to sweat, no day cold enough to be freezing.

There wouldn't be war if there was no hunger. There was nothing sort of a natural disaster here.

The days in Ishana were really peaceful.

That was why Kazuma sometimes forgot.

Taking a step ahead outside the island, the whole world, with the exception of this island, was approaching the crisis of destruction.

Today was 2106 AD.

It started six years ago, 2100 AD, January 1st.

In Japan, an island nation located in Far East, an unidentified

monster appeared suddenly.

With an appearance like a snake that had numerous heads, the black monster was gigantic. Only, it had an instinct to lay destruction and massacre indiscriminately.

Furthermore, in the same time as the appearance of the monster, a substance called seithr began to overflow everywhere.

In exchange of neutralizing any harmful substance, as if it was a touch of a living being, the seithr sensed the existence of humans and informed it to the monster. Then, it occasionally became a guide and a lane, summoning the monster.

Following the seithr, the black monster would appear in unexpected places and unexoected moments. When all that lived there weren't quick enough to get away, it would easily destroy everything entirely.

Using nuclear weapon, humanity tried to annihilate the monster by striking the unfortunate country called Japan. But the result ended with failure.

On the contrary, judging by the fact that the destructive being was no longer in Japan, the jet-black apparition bared its fangs toward the whole world.

——The Black Beast.

Facing the apparition which was referred as that, humanity had tried every means they had.

But nothing was proven to be the effective method... Before anyone realized it, people could do nothing but pressured to escape from Black Beast again and again.

In this very moment, some part of the world might be facing

destruction because of Black Beast.

Despite that, there were lushly green parks, roadside trees, and variously colored flowers blooming in Ishana where Kazuma lived in.

For Black Beast to be in this island, it would be like an illusion as if it was a depicted nightmare.

"...Hm?"

Kazuma, who had been dazing with his arms placed on the window frame, suddenly took notice of a part of the scenery.

The academy's courtyard could be seen from the windows on the corridor. Naturally, the courtyard had school buildings and auditorium which the students used there. There were many Mage’s Guild's facilities constructed there.

Among those, there was a single pure white building which was called as the Cathedral. Several people were busily going in and out there.

The Cathedral was the most sacred place among the Mage’s Guild. It wasn't only used by the Guild's people to held important meeting or when there was a ceremony. With the exception of when there was a special class for the academy's students, it was prohibited to trespass without reason.

Judging by the robes they wore, the people who were going in and out seemed to be the Mage’s Guild's officials. If it was only that, it shouldn't be unusual. However, there was a single person who put on a big, triangular hat on the head.

That hat that was noticeable from distance held a special meaning for the Mage’s Guild.

"Ten Sages..."

The Ten Sages were the directors among directors who possessed top-class authority within Mage’s Guild. So to say, someone who had been chosen, a privileged class.

It wasn't an exaggeration to say that they were the one who presently set the Mage’s Guild in motion. No one would be permitted to approach the Mage’s Guild's most highly classified information that was seemingly stored in the deepest part of the Cathedral if they were not a Ten Sage.

Kazuma watched the fist's movements of the Ten Sages who was giving instruction to the restless subordinates. The mark of the chosen one on the big hat moved right and left.

(Come to think of it, it's said that there's a canonization ceremony for a new Ten Sage today.)

It was a very rare occasion.

Ten Sages was a privileged class. Therefore, to be appointed, one must have an authority over the fitting knowledge and experiences, a degree of contribution toward Mage’s Guild, and most of all, the required strength of magic. Hence why, since Ten Sages was introduced, the number of people kept on being less than ten people for a long time.

The Ten Sage this time seemed to be an active student.

In addition to the rare appointment of a Ten Sage, it was unprecedented for a student to take up a post there.

With that 'unprecedented' coming from his classmates, it drew a somewhat interest even from Kazuma who just spent his days lazing around.

(If I'm not mistaken... it was Konoe Mercury)

She was undisputedly a super excellent student who had

been hailed as a prodigy ever since she came to Mage’s Guild. Because of her gorgeous appearance, in addition to known to have a very up-tight personality, she was a very well-known person in Ishana for various reasons.

Having no such grades, and also plain appearance and personality, Kazuma was the polar opposite existence of her.

(In this world, there are people who walk a bright path of life.)

Feeling discouraged, he let out a sigh. It was a world which didn't have much relation with Kazuma.

It was no use looking at it continuously as if he was being jealous of his neighbor's green lawn. As the class would begin soon, Kazuma went away from the window. Granted, there was hardly any jealous feeling left toward the Ten Sages position.

At that moment, suddenly.

———.

A voice was heard.

Kazuma looked back.

But unsurprisingly, there was only an opened window. There was no figure of a person.

"...Huh?"

He felt that he had certainly heard someone's voice just now. At any rate, he had a feeling that he had surely been called.

"I don't like this... Hallucinating after having a memory loss. It seems I can no longer laugh at it sometimes soon."

While scratching his head as if he was disturbing his hair,

Kazuma turned his back on the window once more.

The timing was just right as the bell that informed the start of the next class echoed throughout the corridor. Kazuma reflexively looked up at the ceiling and trotted back to the classroom.

Part 3

The circular hall made of white stone was enveloped in solemn atmosphere.

The ceiling was high and shaped like a hemisphere. The walls which were in perfect circle had several thick pillars nestled close together. Some statue-like objects silently lined up at regular intervals.

Between the pillars, crystals as big as human head were floating. Since they were charged with the power of magic, like floating water surface, they were flickering up and down while shining in pale white.

Surrounded by some divine light, several figures who were wearing dignified robes and large triangular hats stood in a circular pattern.

The number of people was less than ten.

They uniformly turned their sights to the center. At the end of it, one girl was kneeling. With long mantle spread on the floor and long hair over her back which slipped from her shoulders, she hung her head as if giving a prayer.

From the circle, a single robed figure stepped forward and stood in front of the girl.

"Konoe Mercury. I hereby appoint you as Ten Sage, he who possesses great wisdom... You are now called as 'Nine'."

The one who announced it with a stern voice was a sturdy and massive elderly man.

The girl... Konoe. No, Nine. She answered with her knees still down on the cold floor.

"I humbly accept it."

A different robed figure drew close. First, he walked up to the elderly man before passing a purple hat. A large triangular hat, like what a witch who appeared in fairy tale would wear.

It was the proof of the chosen one, Ten Sage.

The symbol of the passed down knowledge was placed on Nine's head.

"Now, from this very moment, a new wisdom has joined the Ten Sages. According to the sacred order, that intelligence will last for eons."

With the majestic declaration, several other attendances repeated the same phrases. Great number of voices blended, reverberated on the tall ceiling.

The Ten Sage name was bestowed only to the most prominent magicians in Mage’s Guild. With her head remain hung, Nine indifferently listened to the end of the canonization alone.

When Nine came out from the Cathedral, it was already the last half of the noon recess.

The Ten Sage canonization was held deep underground in the Cathedral, a special room that was forbidden to enter for anyone other than a Ten Sage. It was probably because she had always been looking down in the windowless room as she thought that it had been a long time since she felt the refreshing outside air when the wind profusely stirred.

Around the Cathedral was a courtyard within the academy. With the exception of the path that was covered in stone tiles, there were carefully trimmed shrubs and trees enveloping the lush lawn. They stood side-by-side as if it was a natural park.

Within such peaceful spectacle, Nine walked toward the school building. Her long, straight hair which was covering her back was gracefully fluttering as the wind blew through it.

The other Ten Sages were still inside the Cathedral. With nobody on the surroundings, a refreshing serenity was drifting in the air.

Suddenly, there were light footsteps running which broke the silence. From the opposite side of the gently curved path, two figures that Nine knew well appeared.

"Onee-chaaaan!"

The girl, who had deep brown hair that had a ponytail bundled up at high position, furiously waved her hand while calling Nine in a lively voice.

Behind her, there was another girl wearing a big round eye glasses. She barely caught up with the first girl as she was accompanying her. Her fluffy platinum blonde hair was beautiful. As if restraining it, she wore the hood of her robe.

Just as she fixed her eyes at the two figures, Nine's expression that had been looked amused began to become cheerful.

"Celica! Trinity!"

Straining her soft-colored eyes, Nine also faced both of them and waved her hand.

The girl, who had her ponytail jolted as she abruptly stopped in front of Nine, was Celica A. Mercury. She was Nine's younger sister.

Behind her, the glassed girl who was out of breath after she had caught up with Celica was called as Trinity Glassfille. She was Nine's one and only friend.

Celica's eyes which had deep color that resembled wet soil were sparkling. Somewhat excited, she opened her mouth.

"Is it over, Onee-chan? The Ten Sage's canonization, that is!"

"It's over. Although it's a canonization ceremony, I'm just following the old procedure. It's not like I'm doing anything special."

"But still, about that."

Toward the innocently excited Celica, Nine let out a wry smile as she was amazed. While watching the lovable scene of them both, Trinity spoke softly.

"Didn't you receive that peculiar hat~?"

Trinity spoke with a carefree and slow tone of voice. Nine moved her gaze up to look at the top her head. As one would expect, she wasn't able to look at it completely without a mirror, but she could clearly see the unnecessarily wide circular brim.

"The hat's just an ornament."

She uninterestedly snorted.

"Besides, for me to be a Ten Sage seriously bothers me. Actually, rather than me, Trinity is more fitting for it."

"Oh my... You speak of such thing again~."

Looking at her friend's unusual expression that was like a sulking child, Trinity smiled bitterly with her brows down. Just the other day, Nine had spoken the same thing when it was decided that she had been appointed as a Ten Sage.

If Nine was excellent at handling magic, then Trinity was a prodigy in sensing and analyzing magic information in an instant. She also excelled at alchemy. Taken from Trinity's beautiful hair, she was given the nickname of Platinum the TrinityThe Platinum Alchemist. She was that admired of a person.

Natural talent aside, Nine considered that Trinity's profound wisdom which supported her capability was an ability that really should have been evaluated.

Toward Nine who got displeased again, Trinity laughed in a soft voice that truly matched her meek appearance.

"That hat suits you well~."

"...Thanks."

With a troubled smile on her face, Nine shrugged her shoulders as if she was hiding her embarrassment.

Toward the usual and ordinary Nine who had the symbol of greatest honor crowned on her head, Trinity straightened herself while putting her modest respect.

"From now on, I guess you must be called as Nine."

"Nine?"

Slightly inclining her head, Celica asked in her curiosity.

After Nine exchanged glance with Trinity again, she answered with a wry smile.

"A term for the person joining the Sage's sequence... Simply put, it's a particular name that's given to imply that someone is a Ten Sage. Since I'm the ninth, then it's Nine. Although it's only a formality, I'm glad that I don't need to spare a time to change my name anymore."

Since Nine was frank when she spoke, it was Trinity who smiled wryly this time.

Nine's real name was Konoe. Konoe Mercury.

However, Nine wasn't fond of her name. Trinity and Celica knew well the reason. It was because the person who gave the name was Nine and Celica's father.

Nine despised her father. Even that was pushing it. She disliked it when Celica brought up her father.

But six years ago, it had become unknown whether her father was actually alive or dead.

"I see... Since it's been decided, I guess there's no helping it."

Downhearted, Celica pulled her chin.

Nine might loathe the Konoe name, but for Celica, it was an important name of her important sister. Although it was the rule, it was a little sad for her sister's name to get changed.

"But... Although you're the 'Nine of the Ten Sages', Onee-chan is still my big sis... right?'"

Pulling her chin with upturned eyes, Celica looked up at the sister who was taller than her, as if she was peeking.

Looking at the honest eyes which showed courtesy, as if flinching, Nine gasped in a somewhat comical movement.

And then, as she could bear it no longer, she hugged Celica close to her voluptuous bosoms with terrifying strength.

"Of course I am, Celica~~~~! Whatever the position, whatever the name, I'm still your big sister! Aah~, don't make that face. There might be an insolent bastard hiding somewhere trying to ruin that adorable and helpless face of yours!"

"O-Onee-cha... It hurts..."

Having her face crushed in the soft chest, Celica struggled. Regulating her breath after she somehow got her face released, Celica raised her eyes to Nine while still being hugged.

"That's right. Onee-chan, you still haven't had a lunch, have you? Let's eat together. I was waiting for you."

"Eh? You what? You still haven't eaten yet? I thought I told you to eat before."

As Nine looked bewildered as she spoke, Celica gave a spoiled smile.

"It's because I wanted to celebrate."

"Celebrate? What for?"

"Of course to congratulate Onee-chan for being a Ten Sage. Hmph, this is a special occasion, but you're still completely the same as usual."

Celica pouted her lips.

Beside them, Trinity giggled. It was like she was watching kittens playing together.

"Come on now, we should go. If we keep chatting here, the noon recess will be over in a flash~. Right, Celica-san? Nine?"

"Wah! That'll be bad!"

Flustered, Celica slipped through from Nine's embrace. Reversing the position, this time she grabbed her sister's arm. With a cheerful voice, she gave a happy smile to her sister.

"Let's go, Onee-chan. I'll treat you the cafeteria's pudding as a celebration!"

"Pudding...? I'm not a kid, you know."

Even if she was reluctant while saying that, Nine started walking to follow Celica.

She had always known about it, but she truly had nice younger sister and best friend.

Slightly fixing the large hat placed on her head while secretly smiling, Nine, sandwiched between her sister and best friend, left the courtyard.

Part 4

The school cafeteria in Mage’s Guild's academy. Although it didn't have the capacity to accommodate the whole student body, it was a wide open place that could manage the majority of them.

From the large windows, the scenery of courtyard and soft sunshine came into eyes without restraint. Since today was such a clear day, one would briefly forget that this place existed in a school.

With plenty of menus and even going as far as installing television which was broadcasting news, every day, the place would be filled with a great number of students during the noon recess.

Kazuma was also one of the students who liked to go to this cafeteria. Occupying alone the table close to the wall which was a bit separated from the crowd, he was about to finish

eating the daily special Lunch C.

During the day where he had a class, Kazuma's lunch would always be this menu. There were two reasons. First, it was bothersome to think about what to order for every single thing. The other one... inside the daily special Lunch C, a hard-boiled egg would be included there.

Kazuma by no means was a gourmet. He was also not particularly strict in his diet.

However, it's just that the hard-boiled egg was special.

Looks, taste, simplicity. There was nothing to complain about any of them. There were salad and hot sandwich placed in the plate, but the hard-boiled egg was the true main course for Kazuma.

"Well then..."

He had already finished eating the cuisine which had filled his plate, with the exception of the hard-boiled egg he had saved for the last.

First was to taste the black tea and immediately putting it back. Next was to take the smooth texture of that object into his hands.

Just in case not to get its contents damaged, he gently hit it to the table's edge several times. As the white shell started to get numerous cracks, he carefully peeled it with his thumbs.

And finally after the bouncy hard-boiled egg appeared, Kazuma, quite satisfied, raised it near his mouth.

"Beautiful..."

It was an undoubtedly perfect of a shape.

There was nothing special to it and Kazuma didn't have any goal in doing this. Every day, this precise time probably was the time he looked forward the most.

Picking up the salt that was provided for the table, Kazuma

lightly sprinkled it to the smooth white skin of the egg. First, he would get a mouthful... and so as he thought. It was during that moment.

"Why, if it isn't Kazuma-san."

"Ah...?"

Toward the out of nowhere voice, Kazuma turned his neck around with his mouth half-opened.

Standing there was a platinum blonde girl wearing round eye glasses. The gentle atmosphere wasn't overflowing from the voice only, but also from her whole body.

Kazuma recognized the girl who had cream sauce pasta in her tray.

"Oh my, Trinity-san. Having lunch now?"

"Yes. I had a little errand today."

She was a female student from the same class. For the uniform, beside the mantle, you could choose any robe. Although she was often wearing the latter, she usually put on the hood as if to hold down her soft hair.

Like a child wondering if she was a witch coming out from a fairy-tale, Kazuma believed that he frequently saw her.

There were two other people behind Trinity. A beautiful female classmate with her long hair flowing over her back and a short girl with her hair bundled up at a high position. They both stood there.

Kazuma also knew about the beautiful girl. She was a classmate just like Trinity.

Her name was Konoe Mercury. Presently, she wasn't a

stranger among the academy. She was a rare prodigy who got selected as a Ten Sage even when she was a student.

But the other pony-tailed girl was a new face. The girl's face peeked from behind Trinity.

"Hm? A friend of Trinity-san? Good afternoon."

Her huge eyes looked straight at Kazuma without reservation. Their gaze met.

That moment, the chill he had vaguely felt until now suddenly intensified. His hair stood on its end.

He didn't know the cause. For some reason, he could not return the gaze of the pupils which were facing him. Kazuma averted his eyes as if succumbed to her strength.

"Aah, err. Hello."

He barely answered with a faint voice.

Suspicious at that, Konoe Mercury glanced.

"Who? Your acquaintance?"

Since she flung the remark over her shoulder, Trinity's face became troubled.

"What do you mean by who? He's Kazuma Kuvaru. Isn't he in the same class as you, Kono... Nine?"

"There's such a guy? I didn't know."

"O-Onee-chan, just how impolite you are!? I'm sorry, Kazuma-san. Onee-chan's bad in remembering people's names..."

As she placed the plate containing meat sauce spaghetti, the ponytailed girl proficiently bowed her head.

Taking a few seconds to be aware of the gesture which was addressed at him, Kazuma, late in coming to his senses, hurriedly shook his head. This situation of having three different types of girls standing while looking at him was completely overwhelming.

"N-no... Don't worry about it."

After Kazuma replied, the face of the pony-tailed girl suddenly turned into a smile. The very picture of carefree and innocent of an expression made Kazuma astonished again.

At the same time, he felt another indescribable discomfort accompanied with chills that ran through his spine.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Celica A. Mercury. You're Onee-chan's classmate, right? Thanks for always taking care of my sister."

A voice like the sound of a blooming flower. The tone of voice and expression had to be the characteristic of this girl called Celica.

Rather than envy... he felt a little dislike. Particularly to this girl.

"He didn't take care of me. We've never spoken after all. I didn't even notice his presence."

"Ha, haha..."

As for the point given by Konoe Mercury, who supposed to be Celica's sister, it felt mercilessly cold. Kazuma's stiff mouth laughed. Even though there was several times when they had exchanged words, it seemed they were completely erased from her memory.

"Um... That hat."

When Kazuma took notice of the hat which was placed on the beautiful girl's head, he reflexively let his voice out.

A big, triangular purple hat which had a wide brim. Kazuma understood well its meaning.

"It's the canonization ceremony, right? Congratulations for being a Ten Sage, Konoe Mercury-san."

After he put the egg aside, Kazuma made a gentlemanly smile as much as he could.

But the beautiful woman wearing triangular hat glared at Kazuma with an intense look. With a tone of voice that sounded too arrogant, she spoke clearly.

"It's Nine."

"Yes?"

"My name. I don't have the tiny bit of desire to be addressed by you, but call me Nine if you're going to address me again."

"Aah... Nine, is it."

When someone became a Ten Sage, a name following the number of one to ten was given. From that time, that person would be referred with the name. Kazuma remembered now that such a rule existed.

But somehow, the name Nine had something more than just a rule for her. She was someone that shouldn't be made angry by doing a mistake inadvertently. Kazuma decided to firmly imprint the new name of his classmate which was easy to forget to his brain.

"Ah, that's right."

Celica suddenly came up with something and then opened her

mouth.

"Kazuma-san. If you don't mind, can we have lunch together?"

"Yes... Eh, what?"

After he reflexively answered, he spontaneously asked again. He really couldn't comprehend what she had spoken of. Celica on the other hand had an expression as if she had an idea she found splendid.

"I was thinking to do a celebration for Onee-chan today. But... since we're sort of coming late, there's no more empty seat."

"Aaah, I see."

Now that she mentioned it, all the tables in the cafeteria had certainly been filled. Not so many people came to the cafeteria at this time of day, but nevertheless, it was surprisingly crowded today.

Celica, shrugging her shoulders, let out a childish smile.

"Besides, it's not often for a chance to meet Onee-chan's friend that isn't Trinity-san. I want to talk with Kazuma-san more."

"With me? But..."

Even with the smile that was like baiting him, the reluctant Kazuma spoke ambiguously.

For some reason, he didn't want to get too close to this girl named Celica.

In the first place, Kazuma didn't know a lot about Nine. He didn't know what Celica was expecting, but there was nothing worth mentioning to talk about.

It seemed Nine also didn’t want to share a table with Kazuma.

When his eyes fled from Celica's gaze to look forward, sure enough, Konoe... Nine observed Kazuma with her eyebrows furrowed in discontent.

Kazuma spontaneously averted his eyes. Konoe Mercury. Nine. Whichever her name was, he didn't want to have her keep an eye on him too much.

However, that wish was far from being realized.

"Celica-san, you mustn't ask such unreasonable request. He seems to have already finished his lunch~."

"Eeh, so it's no good? I wanted to get along... Too bad."

Lectured by Trinity to take consideration, Celica dropped her small shoulders.

Seeing such a state, how could he turn her down?

For quite a while, his body felt a strange bad feeling. But it might be just his imagination.

"...Umm, I don't mind. There are enough empty seats for exactly another three people."

"Go ahead," said Kazuma as he showed a gentle smile. The smile was by no means his true feelings. It was more like a habit that would come out the moment someone faced other people.

But Celica received the impression of the smile she saw. A smile from the bottom of her heart, which was different than Kazuma's, bloomed all over her expression.

"Really!? Hooray! Thank you, Kazuma-san. Ah, then I'll go buy another congratulatory pudding. It's my thanks for listening to

my selfishness!"

No sooner after she talked, Celica put the tray containing her lunch on the seat in front of Kazuma and ran off with her long hair leaped.

"Eh, ah. No, I'm..."

There wasn't any opportunity to stop her.

Like clockwork, Celica had gone to the cafeteria's counter vigorously.

As Kazuma was overcame with surprise watching it, Trinity's tray was placed on the seat next to him.

"My apologies, Kazuma-san. But thanks for helping us out~."

"Good grief... She never listens when she starts talking."

Although she seemed a bit sullen, Nine still reluctantly placed her lunch at the table while also taking a seat.

When he looked at Trinity's tray and also Nine's, small custard puddings sort of placed there.

(I see. So this is the congratulatory gift.)

Most likely, it was that child Celica who suggested it.

As he glanced, a long ponytail swayed left and right as she heading this way. On her hands, Celica was holding a similar pudding to the one in her tray.

Kazuma somehow felt like giving up.

It looked like it's going to be a long lunch.

Part 5

A fork was winding around above a plate, intertwining meat sauce and spaghetti.

While carrying it to her mouth, Celica casually stared directly at Kazuma who was sitting in front of her.

"So, Kazuma-san also doesn't talk much except with Trinity-san?"

The topic surrounding the lunch was about the relationships within Kazuma's classroom.

By the way, having lunch with women, Kazuma, already finished eating the hardboiled egg, was now somewhat poking the pudding he received from Celica. The table might look distinctly showy compared to the usual, but still, the hardboiled egg tasted wonderfully delicious.

"Hey, Celica. What do you mean by 'also'? That guy and me aren't in the same level."

The first one to open her mouth at Celica's words was Nine. Dissatisfaction was clearly mixed in her explicit tone which had been going on until now.

But not minding her sister's complaint, Celica instead gave her a straight answer.

"But Onee-chan, if Trinity-san weren't here, wouldn't you only have me as a partner to eat a meal with? When you went for a vacation, there were just Trinity-san and me."

"...It's meaningless to associate myself with people whose level is far from mine."

"See, you said it again. That's why you're considered as a scary person."

As the sisters began quarreling all of a sudden, Kazuma was dumbfounded while grasping tightly at the pudding spoon.

No one had ever thought that there existed a person who could speak so bluntly to the talented Nine who was feared because of her tight personality. On the contrary, Nine was overwhelmed. It was hard to believe that the sudden spectacle could happen to the exceptional prodigy who enrolled the same class as him.

But different from Kazuma, Trinity, who seemed had been used to seeing it, nonchalantly proceeded to eat, smiling as she watched the sisters.

Celica once again got her sight back to Kazuma.

"Ah. I'm sorry, Kazuma-san. Please continue with your story."

"Even if I continue with the talk... As you say, I also speak on daily basis with just Trinity-san."

"'Also'?"

From diagonally in front of him, Nine's sharp voice came.

"Ah, no..."

Kazuma quickly closed his mouth with his hand.

Beside him, Trinity laughed a little.

"Hey. Why are you laughing, Trinity?"

"Fufu... So-sorry, Nine. I don't mean anything bad."

"I'm not asking about that. Good grief."

Pouting, Nine folded her arms beneath her plump chest after she brushed her hair.

Kazuma tried to keep showing a smile while scratching his cheek. Since he wasn't used to be involved in such setting like this, he was actually troubled. Easily creating such awkward atmosphere seemed like one of the strong points of women.

Setting aside the peevish opinion, Kazuma hesitantly opened his mouth.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean Nine-san and I have the same level... I was trying to say that Trinity-san is a nice person since she greeted me even though I'm low profile."

"Oh. But Kazuma-san isn't low profile."

"No, no, that's not true. It's unthinkable."

Even when Kazuma seemed to be giving in, he raised both of his hand at the height of his chest and shook his head to Trinity as she tried to dismiss it.

Seeing that, this time it was Celica who laughed. She curiously let out a girlish laugh, or rather the tone of someone who laughed delightfully.

"Kazuma-san is an interesting person. At first, I thought you aren't that good at chatting. But I learned that you speak about lots of things. I'm somewhat happy."

"Oh... is that so?"

"Umm. Can I talk to you more often from now on? I want to know more about Kazuma-san."

"Eeh!? Err, that's..."

Couldn't answer her right away, Kazuma's eyes wandered as he panicked.

He didn't look back at Celica's eyes that staring directly at him.

Someone who hated this girl called Celica must be rare. Somehow, even if someone was overwhelmed by her nonstop vigor, his heart would quickly be snatched by the honest good will and that adorable laughter. At times, Celica's behavior was similar to the innocence of puppy or kitten.

However, Kazuma for some reason wasn't fond of Celica. The reason was unknown... Looking at her eyes made him had trouble in breathing. It made his chest felt tight.

(She shouldn't be a bad girl though...)

While Kazuma was still trying to decide his answer, Nine stood up as if interrupting his thought. The chair which was pulled roughly made one thought that she wasn't composed no matter how optimistic a person was when he looked at it.

"Celica. Come here for a second."

"Huh?"

As Celica was about to finish the meat sauce spaghetti, her arm was pulled when Nine left the table. Celica followed her sister while still wide-eyed.

The girls stopped their feet at the sandwich and bread counter which would immediately be filled with lines of student once the noon recess start. It was a bit away from the table where Kazuma and Trinity were left behind, but it's not a distance where they could see the girls' expressions.

Along with Trinity who was peeling off the pudding's seal, Kazuma watched over at the situation. No sooner after she suddenly looked over her shoulder, Nine spoke.

"Stop getting involved with that suspicious man! It'll only get you into trouble!"

The flowing disapproval came flying to Kazuma's ears. It cleared the question on why she felt that getting away from her seat was needed.

The powerful tone was enough to make someone cowered, but it didn't even make Celica winced.

"Kazuma-san isn't suspicious! He might be a bit strange of a person, but it's harsh to brand him like that when we don't know him enough!"

"It's not necessary getting to know about him. You should know when you see him. Such questionable man, whose thought can't be figured from his expression, isn't a decent person."

"That's not true!"

"Anyway, don't get familiar and approach that mysterious guy. You have a cute face and personality, but something crucial is missing. It will make sly and dishonest people take advantage of you."

"What are you saying!? You seem to accuse Kazuma-san for a sly and dishonest person!"

The eyes of many students who were spending the moment after their lunch gathered on the voices of the quarreling sisters. It might be because some of them were guessing the 'Kazuma-san' topic that was raised by the sisters as they were gradually looking at the direction of the table where Kazuma was.

Unable to bear the situation, Kazuma fixed his eyes on the yellow milk of the pudding as if turning his eyes from reality.

What quite shocking was Celica's remark when she completely denied the 'questionable man whose thought can't

be figured from his expression' Nine had said.

(...I wonder if I'm that questionable?)

He tried to place his hand somewhere on his stunned face. As the mouth his fingers touched expressed a stiff smile that he was unaware of, he got shocked again.

"Umm, Kazuma-san?"

While the paralyzed Kazuma had his hand on his cheek, a worried voice came from beside him.

With a dry smile and trembling shoulders, Kazuma spoke to himself.

"...From now on, I wonder what kind of face would be good when facing them..."

"Uh, umm... please don't worry about it too much ~. Nine somewhat loses control when it comes to Celica-san. She will just disregard her surroundings~."

Even Trinity also had a bothered smile. She must have given this explanation to someone from times to times. Experiences with troubles seeped from how she talked.

"Besides, I like Kazuma-san's politeness and modesty. I think of you as a good-natured person."

"Haha... Thanks for that."

It's more preferable by far than a harsh criticism, but getting praised straight to his face was embarrassing. Kazuma awkwardly loosened up while scratching his mouth.

"Even so, Trinity-san is also a person who burdened with troubles, right? Like with her and me, you associate with people who aren't used to the class."

"Fufu. But compared to Kazuma-san's hardship, it feels pleasant."

"My hardship?"

"Your memory. It hasn't returned, right?"

"Aah..."

Kazuma had memory loss. It was a story that was known among his classmates.

The first time around, it wasn't a common thing. But now he practically didn't know just how many people had learned about it.

Kazuma also didn't wish for the issue to get mentioned too much. Getting inquired out of curiosity would only bother him. Also, Kazuma usually didn't care about it too much.

However, sometimes Trinity was concerned about Kazuma.

It was by no means wasn't troublesome.

Trinity had an enthusiasm which as if she asked 'how are you doing?' to someone who had chronic disease. She made serious sounding words like 'memory loss' sounded like something lighthearted.

"Well, it hasn't returned at all. I even think that I might not have a past to remember."

"Oh, please don't say about such a thing."

"Aah, no no. I'm aware of it."

Kazuma gave a loose smile to the rebuking Trinity who had a gloomy expression.

"It's not like I'm pessimistic about it, so don't worry."

Even if he was pessimistic, he didn't know if having nothing to remember was something to be delighted or lament with.

Kazuma suddenly realized something and raised his face. Before he knew it, the sisters' quarrel could no longer be heard.

When he looked at them, both of them were silent while still at the same place as before. They stared at the large television which was installed in the cafeteria as if devouring it. Their expressions were pale for being drawn by interest only.

Following the girls' line of sight, Kazuma also looked toward the television.

Inside the rectangular screen, the usual news program was airing. The newscaster talked on and on while somewhat trembling.

It was a news that arrived from a certain particular country.

Part 6

"——that. I will report it again. This morning, according to the investigation team of the United Nations who went to Japan, a survivor has been found. For the six years period of time since the nuclear strike on Japan, the survivor took a shelter in the underground and appeared to be living hidden below. Although he is considerably weak, there's nothing serious that might endanger his life. For now, the investigation team will wait for his physical condition to recover before hearing the circumstances that has been going on for six years from him."

Japan.

The country where Black Beast, the monster that spread terror

and anxiety throughout the world by appearing in unexpected place and at unexpected moments, had first appeared. In order to eliminate its threat, nuclear missiles were launched and virtually destroyed the country.

Because of high concentration of radioactivity and chemical substances, Japan had been contaminated. It had turned into the land of death where no beings could live there. But as the pollution steadily lessened, the United Nations dispatched an investigation team half a year ago.

As this time civilians were also able to embark to Japan, investigations which had certain purposes had taken place. But it seemed... the result was that a survivor that had been left behind in Japan for six years was found.

"A survivor... in Japan?"

The screen was a bit distant, but the newscaster's voice was clearly audible. Kazuma breathed out in his interest.

But Trinity kept silent with a serious distress of an expression. It seemed Kazuma's murmur didn't reach her ears.

"Trinity Glassfille-san?"

When he questioningly asked, Trinity turned around with a gasping sound trembled on her throat. Her pretty green eyes opened wide. A slight disturbance could be seen there.

"Ah... um, no. It's nothing,"

With a faint smile, Trinity dropped her gaze to the pudding she held in her hand. Most of it was hidden by the hood and hair, but sorrow still spread on her face.

Kazuma moved his gaze.

What Trinity was seeing wasn't the television. It was Nine and Celica.

The sisters had been arguing seriously until a while ago. They got somewhat stunned as they watched the news. Slipping through the students, they returned here. The grim faced Nine urged the dejected Celica to walk.

"C'mon, Celica."

Nine forced the delicate Celica to sit on the chair before she sat down on her own.

Silence fell on the table. The congratulatory pudding seemed gloomy.

No one opened their mouth. Enduring such atmosphere, Kazuma timidly called out to Celica who looked disheartened compared to anyone else.

"Has something happened?"

Although Celica certainly raised her sight, she shook her head without saying anything. The barely expressed smile on her mouth was very unsuitable for the extremely cheerful girl. It really made Kazuma worried.

"Have you been in bad condition? Your face seems..."

Awfully pale.

He was about to say it. The moment his hand somewhat stretched toward Celica, it happened. Terrible chills ran through Kazuma's spine.

(Eh...?)

Delayed for a moment, this time dizziness distorted his vision. In the blink of an eye, his sense of balance went awry.

Kazuma held his head using the hand that was intended for Celica.

"Kazuma-san? Are you okay?"

On the contrary, Celica worriedly called out to him. She half rose to her feet, lowering herself down. With her small hand, she touched Kazuma's forehead.

"...!?"

At that moment, Kazuma shook off Celica's hand with all his strength.

A slapping sound echoed. Kazuma kicked down his chair and stood up.

"Ah... I-I'm... sor..."

Celica was confused and Nine grimaced as she started to get upset. When his sight stopped at the two of them, Kazuma squeezed out his trembled voice to speak.

His words never got reverberated until the end. Welled up with terrible nausea, Kazuma immediately fell to his knees and went to a sitting posture.

"Kazuma-san!?"

Trinity left her seat in a hurry and leaned over to Kazuma's side.

Celica also became panic as she rushed over to him.

"H-hold on, what's the matter!? Hang in there!"

Kazuma's stiffened eyes looked up at Celica who was crouching before his eyes.

Welling up along with nausea, his chest was filled with... discomfort as if he was being swallowed.

(No... Don't come... Don't... come here.)

The dizziness was mixed up together with words of rejection. My head hurts. I want to throw up.

"Do you feel sick? We must get to the infirma..."

"I... I'm fine."

Kazuma's desperate thought interrupted the words of the worrying Celica. He straightly refused the stretched hand that was going to rub his back.

Forcibly pulling the shivering mouth, he made a smile.

"I'm... all right. I suddenly felt a bit sick... but I'll go to the infirmary on my own."

"But, you shouldn't be alo..."

"Please. I'm okay."

Do not touch me.

As it nearly slipped from his mouth, Kazuma swallowed the spilled words along with saliva.

He didn't know the reason. He didn't understand but... he couldn't help but felt really unpleasant and horrible.

His fist was so tight that its nails were eating the skin. He placed the fist on the wall as he stood up.

At this rate, he must not remain here. He really shouldn't stay here.

"...Sorry. I beg your pardon to go ahead. I'm really okay."

Trying to sound as healthy as he could, Kazuma left the cafeteria as if he was fleeing.

Chapter 2: Cat of Crimson Sunset

Part 1

When the afternoon classes over, the sky on the west side of Ishana started to change color.

The evening on this island unexpectedly went to night in the blink of a time. In the short interval until the day sunk completely, the sky was dyed in burning color. The city changed color as if enveloped by scarlet veil.

While it was a fantastic and beautiful scenery, at the same time, a vague fear of something beyond human understanding could also be felt from the spectacle.

During such afterschool, Kazuma walked toward the dormitory alone, without a friend accompanying him.

His feet were heavy. Sometimes he staggered. He still hadn't recovered from the sudden bad condition he got during the end of the noon recess. Even now the light dizziness still lasted. There was still listless pain inside his head.

Sometime before, Kazuma escaped to the infirmary's bed. But after he gradually calmed down enough, he participated during the middle of the afternoon class.

He told the worrying Trinity that there was nothing to concern anymore. But the truth wasn't like that.

While casting his eyes down as if avoiding the strong setting sun, Kazuma put his hand on his heavy head.

"Uuh... I don't feel good..."

His bitter throat groaned.

Previously, there were times when headache and dizziness tortured him every now and then. Mostly, it occurred when he tried hard to remember the past he had forgotten.

(Still, what happened during the noon recess wasn't like that...)

With the area between his eyebrows furrowed, Kazuma unsteadily made his feet to advance.

The abnormal discomfort during that time wasn't the same as the usual dizziness. It felt like an invisible hand crawled up from inside his body, grasped his head, and forcefully dragging it down.

Even remembering it now made him welling up with nausea.

"Just what exactly is happening..."

That time, he sensed that his condition went awful just as Celica tried to touch him. But such an absurd thing shouldn't be possible. It's a different story if Celica got something like extremely troubling special ability that made the healthiness of the person she touched plunge into bad condition.

(...I wonder if she took offense at it.)

He had unintentionally shaken off Celica's hands. No, Kazuma himself didn't remember if the reactions could be described with those simple words.

It seemed to have made Trinity surprised. As for Nine, he

probably had entered her kill list. ...If possible, he wanted to deny that.

"Hurk..."

It's no good. He still didn't feel well.

At this rate, going with the usual path would make him frontally basked with the setting sun while endlessly climbing the lenient hill road.

Stroking his tight chest, Kazuma strayed from the main road and went to an alley.

Sandwiched between buildings on both sides, the path was narrow enough for a car to not be able to get in. It might be because it was dark even during daytime that there were only a few pedestrians here.

The journey was plain and calm. Since it was what he wanted, Kazuma felt a bit relieved. He more or less had to take a detour, but going this direction was a much comfortable way home.

However, Kazuma felt an uncomfortable feeling. He couldn't proceed to go forward.

(...I somehow got a bad feeling.)

Mage’s Guild had a surprisingly large number of people as its members. There was quite a population in Ishana. As the majority of them were students, although they mostly were doing club activities during this time of day, it was still unusual even for the alley to not have a single soul sighted during this still bright time.

To begin with, there was no presence of human.

...No.

(Wrong. Someone's here...)

Somehow arrived at that conclusion, Kazuma stopped walking as if seized with fear.

He was being watched by someone. That feeling wasn't something that could be measured. It was the first time he sensed someone's presence this clear.

He got a somewhat very unpleasant feeling.

What should I do? Should I turn back? The moment Kazuma thought about it and retracted his foot... he heard a voice coming from somewhere.

"——Hey, watch out."

"Eh?"

"It's coming. Dodge!"

Someone was seemingly speaking from some place. As soon as he thought about that, a tension as if being pierced by a fine thread stabbed Kazuma's thin chest.

The next instant, a sharp noise grazed his ear.

Kazuma's body spontaneously moved. Twisting his body, he largely leaped.

At the same time, behind him, the noise of a terribly dangerous slash tore through the alley's eerie silence.

"Wha...!?"

Kazuma turned around in a hurry.

He couldn't believe the scene he saw there.

The stone paving which had been regularly spread all over was deeply gouged, completely changed to a horrible appearance he had never seen before. What could have been used to make it became like this? It was incomprehensible. Kazuma's neck turned around like a creaking tin doll.

Nearby the hollowed ground, a mysterious figure stood up. A tiny child-like body, triangular ears protruding on top of the head, long and thin tail branched into two. It was like a cat standing on two legs.

Was it a human? Or was it a monster? Both of that inexplicable being's large forelegs... hands, tightly gripping dully shining short swords on each of them.

"W-wait. Give me a break already."

There was nothing to be amused about, but Kazuma's mouth was reflexively pulled and made a smile.

Judging from this situation, there was no mistaking that the one who gouged and slashed that ground was the small being there. Perhaps it was done by using the pair of short swords gripped on both of its hands.

But as long as there was no remarkable difference between Kazuma's and the world's knowledge, hollowing out a stone paving using a pair of short swords in such a short time that the sun was still out was nothing short of an impossible feat. It's definitely incorrect for the cat-like being to have a disposition of needing to destroy stone paving no matter what.

What those swords supposed to cut was not the hard ground... it's Kazuma.

Cold sweat oozed on his back.

When Kazuma clumsily retreated, the cat he encountered once again prepared to reversely grip the short swords inside a gloomy shadow. Along with the cold points of those swords, the cat's large eyes sharply seized Kazuma.

"...Kazuma Kuvaru."

The cat spoke. It was a low, hoarse male voice.

Kazuma's feet came to a sudden stop.

"Ye-yes. That's me... but who might you be?"

Even for him, it was an idiotic response. But if he didn't do so, the balance of his spirit would crumble.

It was bizarre no matter how he thought. A cat walked with two feet while thrusting his swords. It was ridiculous for it to exist in reality...

"I am Tomonori. ...I have come to kill you."

No sooner after he coldly spoke, the cat jumped.

Slashing noises buzzed. The two blows definitely didn't possess threat nor suppression, but an intention that went in accordance with his declaration.

"Hii... Uwaaah!?"

It was like approaching wind. Losing himself, Kazuma started to run away. His body was lowered as if falling to the ground, then a sword grazed the tip of his hair.

Couldn't stay still in that spot, Kazuma crawled. Then he placed his back to the wall of a building and tried to turn his face around.

"Haah, haah... W-wait. Please wait."

His heart was rampaging as if it went frenzy.

It wasn't a lie, prank, or dream. That cat was planning to kill him. He would be killed. A fear that was like a needle with blood stench on it pricked Kazuma's whole body.

The cat looked over his shoulder. The cold pair of beast eyes stared at Kazuma.

"...You dodged."

"I-isn't it natural!? Wouldn't I die if I didn't dodge!?"

Although he retorted with a loud voice, it seemed Kazuma himself didn't even understand how he had been able to dodge. He did it despite that he thought that he would surely die when he sensed the swords were being swung.

This time, the cat silently approached to cut him.

"Hii...!"

Kazuma ran. He had heard that when human is driven to extreme situation, they usually display unimaginable capability. But now, it felt certainly true.

Even now, he barely evaded the assaulting slashes as they grazed his skin.

However, that fortune wouldn't last forever.

Tripped on the crooked ground which the cat had previously gouged, Kazuma fell forward and collapsed. The severe impact didn't do anything particular to his whole body, but he got a burning pain on his arm.

Though he felt that he shouldn't look at it, Kazuma accidentally saw it. The spot slightly below the left shoulder of his uniform was deeply cut. He felt a sensation that the shirt

was wet with something.

"Ah, ah..."

Something more vivid than fear overflowed from Kazuma's mind.

As his chin trembled, his teeth made a grinding noise. The beast looked down on him while inside the shadow of a building which had been deeply colored by the evening. When Kazuma raised his face to the faint footsteps, his eyes met the beast's gaze.

The reversely gripped swords were coldly lifted. The tip of a blade was slightly wet in red.

It was wet with Kazuma's blood. The blades' cold silver color appeared similar to a beast's fangs that wanted much more blood and flesh than that.

He would be killed.

His chest went up and down as his breathing got disordered. His stomach was cramped with strain and terror. His knees were shivering and made him couldn't even stand up.

It's useless. He couldn't escape.

(Why... Why is this happening to me...)

He would be killed without even knowing the culprit or the reason. While cursing at the ridiculous situation, Kazuma shut his eyes tightly.

He prepared himself for the sensation of the cold blades.

...However, the cat's swords stopped just before cutting Kazuma's flesh.

(H... Huh?)

He thought that something was wrong. After he counted three seconds, Kazuma timidly opened his eyes. From inside the long bangs, he peeked at the bipedal cat.

The cat dropped the blades, which should have been raised overhead, and faced toward the end of a gentle curve. Its huge ears were raised.

Before long, the cat sheathed the two swords into their scabbards, gave Kazuma a glance, and abruptly vanished as it leaped.

Part 2

The presence of the amassed killing intent disappeared. It was the same for the pressure which had been strangling his neck with tremendous force, and also the piercing feeling of tension.

In the same way as when he had appeared, the cat man disappeared like a passing wind.

The every day's atmosphere came back bursting out. Having his hips completely given out, Kazuma could only sit still at the spot while being dumbfounded.

He couldn't comprehend what had happened even now. He couldn't accept it as a real incident. It felt like he saw the continuation of the strange dream from this morning.

The muffled ears of Kazuma heard approaching footsteps. Kazuma forcibly moved his stiff neck and looked at the direction of the footsteps. Familiar uniforms were rushing over from the gentle curve he faced.

It was Nine, also Trinity and Celica.

As soon as he saw the figure of the girls, strength left Kazuma's whole body. It might be because of the cleared tension that he got attacked by intense dizziness which made him almost fainted.

"Kazuma-san!"

As if sliding, Celica put her knees in front of Kazuma. Nine quickly looked around the surroundings. A bit delayed and out of breath, Trinity squatted beside Celica with a gloomy face.

"Are you all right, Kazuma-san?"

Trinity held up Kazuma's shivering shoulders. When her green eyes looking into him, Kazuma slackened his mouth and made a feeble smile in order to convey that he still had consciousness.

Near him, Trinity began to smile broadly.

"Thank god... What on earth happened?"

"Well... I also don't really understand."

Thanks to seeing a familiar face, he felt somewhat relieved. Even Kazuma thought that he answered with a pathetic voice. He missed her serene voice. He really thought he was going to be killed.

In the meantime, Celica touched Kazuma's left arm and opened her warm brown eyes wide.

"You're injured here. It's really deep."

"Ah, don't."

Immediately, denial words escaped from Kazuma's mouth. Again. He got shivers.

But Celica, who couldn't see what's in Kazuma's mind, interpreted his voice as hesitation. She nodded while smiling as if to encourage him.

"It's okay. It's going to be cured soon."

"Cure...?"

Toward the asking Kazuma who was puzzled, Trinity enlightened him to assure him.

"Celica-san is really skilled in healing magic~."

But behind the long bangs that were concealing his expression, Kazuma frowned.

"Healing..."

He hurriedly stiffened himself and trying carefully not to be rough as he removed Celica's hands. He forcefully dragged his exhausted body to get up.

Reflexively, he showed a strained smile.

"I, I'm fine. Wounds like this will be healed fast enough... Don't worry."

"Eh, but."

Celica's eyes that seemed like saying 'but it'll be healed instantly' looked up at Kazuma.

Kazuma averted his eyes with all his might. He wasn't very good at this situation. When he got an awful dizziness again, Kazuma leaned his back against the wall of a nearby building.

Nine put both of her hands on her hips and turned around at him as if blocking his way.

"Let's start with the explanation."

The voice changed suddenly from Celica and Trinity's gentle voice to a cautious voice.

While hiding the wound on his arm from Celica by covering it with his hand, Kazuma grimaced.

"Even if I explain..."

Worrying about the bewildered Kazuma, Trinity interrupted with gentle words.

"We came here because Nine said that she sensed an unusual force in downtown. And then we saw that Kazuma-san was sitting at the roadside with the road turned like that~..."

"You must have witnessed what happened. Speak."

Nine glanced at the hollowed stone pavement before setting her glare at Kazuma.

He was weak against Celica's gaze, but he wanted to be pardoned from Nine's glare even more. He heard that she was the most genius person in the academy with offensive magic as her specialty. That fact made it seemed like he was being threatened.

"Even if you say I saw it or got involved... A strange creature suddenly appeared and slashed around using sword. The absurd thing there is also its doing."

Wanting to get away from the concentrated gaze, Kazuma directed his line of sight at the ground, looking for sword cuts. The more he looked at it, the more splendid the slashing scars were which made them didn't feel like they belong in reality.

Nine folded her arms confusedly.

"An odd creature you said?"

"Yes. It's similar to both human and cat..."

"Could it be beastkin...?"

Hearing Kazuma's explanation, Nine frowned her eyebrows and supported her chin with her hand as if she was pondering.

The word beastkin Nine spilled that he heard was covered in the lessons for sure, but today was the first time for Kazuma to actually see it.

It was a strange race located at a point exactly between beast and human. Like magic, their figure never showed up in the front side of the history and only existed in the dark.

But why did they appear in Mage’s Guild and attacked Kazuma? Nine's question was also Kazuma's question.

"Onee-chan. For the time being, let's take Kazuma-san back to his room. He might get attacked again."

Celica's straightforward voice broke the silence of thought.

Moment by moment, the evening grew thicker. Presently, the eastern sky was slightly blurred with the presence of night. If the sun sunk, this side of the island which was separated from the main street would get very dark.

Trinity agreed immediately as she nodded.

"She's right. We mustn't let something happen to him on his way back."

"You shouldn't burden yourself that much. I'm really all right now, so..."

"Kazuma-san."

Toward Kazuma's discretion, Trinity took a step and drew closer to him.

She tightly joined her hands together in front of her chest as if praying. With height difference existing between them, her pleading eyes looked up at him as if reprimanding him.

"I beg of you, please let us escort you. I can't return and leave you alone here~."

Even though she used the slow tempo tone he heard in the classroom all the time, her sincerity was enough to make his heart ached. Inside Trinity's eyes that were ready to form tears at any moment, her truly genuine concern toward Kazuma was trembling. Knowing that, why did he turn her down?

(...Somehow, it feels like I've only been doing refusals today.)

Kazuma was corrected by the thought from inside his chest. Just like always.

As if giving up, Kazuma took a breath and pulled the sides of his mouth to make a smile. In truth, his condition got worse again. It really didn't feel like he was able to walk.

"...Understood. Then please do so."

After he spoke his resignation, Trinity smiled tenderly and grabbed Kazuma's arm. Supporting from below, she held his arm to her chest.

Beyond the uniform jacket, the sensation of human body which couldn't be imitated by inorganic substance was transmitted. Rarely having to do with it, Kazuma didn't know how to react.

Since a normal human would certainly have the memory of being embraced by parents, they must have the fitting emotion in regard to the touch.

Kazuma sighed and thought that it didn't matter.

The feet he urged to step forward was aimless and felt light. Was it because of his bad condition and giddy head? Or was it because his memory less self had this emptiness that couldn't be filled?

"Can you walk?"

Startled by the smell of custard on Trinity's voice, Kazuma slightly pulled his chin.

"I'm sorry."

"It's fine. It's my wish after all."

Realizing Kazuma wouldn't resist anymore, Trinity finally spoke with the usual tone. Not pulling him nor falling behind, Trinity matched her pace with Kazuma's while pulling his arm to urge him forward.

Although he was thankful of her compassion, Kazuma couldn't help but have complicated feelings if he accepts Trinity's kindness.

There were many male students in the same year who admired Trinity and Nine. If he was seen like this, he would most likely be called behind the school building and got picked into a fight tomorrow.

With his consciousness receding from time to time while seriously wondering about that thought, Kazuma, accompanied by Trinity, Celica, and Nine, went toward the dormitory.

And then after spending double the time than the usual, Kazuma returned to his own room.

Since Trinity was worried, Celica said that they will quickly come over if something happens as they left. But Nine... only she watched Kazuma with doubting eyes.

After closing the door, his endurance was already at the limit. His head ached so badly. Could no longer grasp the feeling of the floor, he headed toward the bed.

But while it wasn't clear whether he had finally arrived at the bed or not, Kazuma lost his consciousness.

Part 3

Kazuma was led by three girls as they left. On the rooftop of a building somewhat distant from them, there was a shadow looking over his figure motionlessly.

A small build of body that didn't appear like human body, long tails, sharp triangular ears. It was the beastkin swordsman, Tomonori.

Silent like a still life, he kept watch at Kazuma's retreating figure with sharp eyes. Just like confirming his prey.

The air wavered.

Tomonori's ears moved. What wavered wasn't air. It was time and space.

"You're such a useless pet, Tomonori. You didn't obey your owner's command."

From the back, an innocent voice coldly spoke.

Tomonori slightly moved his neck.

The shaking just now came from teleportation. The specialty of the beloved daughter of the person Tomonori's knew well.

"——Rachel, isn't it."

In a low and small voice, he muttered the name of the person who appeared behind.

Rachel Alucard. A girl dressed in black dress with her beautiful long golden hair tied up into two parts. The ribbons used to decorate her hair looked like rabbit ears.

Her outer appearance made her seemed like around six years old, but she mastered a transferring magic that was extremely difficult to control. She possessed the ability to directly transfer to Ishana which had powerful barrier erected on it.

"...You came here because Clavis told you to?"

While asking a question, Tomonori removed his gaze from Rachel to look at downward. His target's figure had already gone. He had failed in killing him.

"Correct. What kind of other errand do you think I have?"

As she spoke with elegant tone that didn't suit her childish appearance and voice, Rachel gently brushed away the hair which had been resting at her shoulder with the back of her hand.

There was slight interest leaking out from the tone of voice that sounded haughty.

"You tried to kill that man."

Tomonori replied with silence. Not concerned about it, Rachel continued.

"Why did you try to kill him? Do you perhaps know something?"

"...You have nothing to do with it. Enough with the tedious talk. Hurry up and take me."

Turning his back and feet from the alley he had been watching, Tomonori stood next to Rachel.

Rachel chuckled a bit. But the words she spoke were the opposite of it.

"Just like usual, you aren't an interesting man."

As she indifferently held out her white hand, a rose-colored

magic field emerged with Rachel at the center. It also covered Tomonori's feet.

"Let us return. My father is waiting."

After the pure voice muttered, a sound similar to whirlwind played and Rachel vanished from Ishana along with Tomonori.

On the sky which was wrapped with the canopy of twilight, the silver full moon was hanging.

That moon wouldn't ever wane. This night wouldn't ever pass. This place was sunk in eternal night. Not located anywhere in the world, the place was like solitary island floating on a valley.

A garden was stretched all over continuously. With crowded ivy crept around the once beautiful place, its appearance was appropriate enough to be called as an abandoned garden.

Among the abandoned garden, a large old castle stood with majestic appearance while also entangled with ivy.

It was the residence of a more than a thousand years old aged vampire, Clavis Alucard.

He had been spending his too long of a lifespan to watch over humanity. Right now, he was facing an old friend inside a parlor, surrounded by tasteful furniture.

"Tomonori. I have too... considered about what you have been thinking."

Locking his fingers above his knees while sitting on a wheelchair, Clavis started by persuading.

His long hair and beard were pure white. The locking fingers were so thin it looked like they were withered branches. But as if the blood red pupils were detached from all of them, they brimmed with the kind of dignity and intelligence that sometimes felt like they could see through up to the bottom of one's heart.

"However, what I had requested to you was to observe, not to assassinate. You have almost killed a sinless youth... Am I wrong?"

Clavis' voice was calm like a spreading ripple on water's surface.

There were two other presences in the room. Clavis' beloved daughter who was sitting on a soft sofa while drinking black tea with rose aroma, Rachel. And the person standing behind Clavis who was wearing refined suit on his trained body, Valkenhayn R. Hellsing the werewolf.

After looking at them with sidelong glance, Tomonori returned his gaze to Clavis and replied coldly.

"You said I was permitted cut him down in the worst case."

"...I have certainly said that. But I truly do not think that was a situation befitting that 'worst case'."

The person he was confronting was an elderly who continued to watch over histories for more than a thousand years. But Tomonori, even in front of those gazing red eyes, full of endless knowledge, didn't show a slightest hint of fear.

"That guy is dangerous. We can't afford to keep him alive."

Since Tomonori's words was declared without any hesitation, Valkenhyan, who had been silent while frowning until now, harshly interrupted.

"The one to decide it is not you!"

But Tomonori moved his gaze to him and stared back at the werewolf butler with such power as if challenging him.

"I decide what I'm going to do."

It was a composed and had unwavering will of a voice. A determined voice of a belief that wouldn't let anyone trample it down.

But that belief was pointed at a direction different from Clavis'.

Clavis' chest sank as he sighed.

"It is still not decided that 'he' will become 'so'. If he remains in peace, then he can continue to be a mere student. ...After all, the future will not always be only one."

"There's only one future."

Clavis' sensitive words bore a wish and desire for something to happen. Tomonori severed it with a voice that hid strong emotions.

"That guy is aware."

There was no hesitation in Tomonori's declaration, the same for his swords.

"...Tomonori. We are not in the position to judge."

"Your faith is like a dull sword to me."

After he said that, Tomonori turned his back on Clavis.

Clavis partly closed his eyes while watching the small stature. He believed that Tomonori's gentle shoulders would never get yield.

Clavis recalled another man who stood in the same way.

"Well, well, well. Your stubbornness is very similar to Mitsuyoshi's."

Clavis smiled as he muttered. Tomonori fiercely glared over his shoulder to Clavis as he did so.

"I have nothing to do with my brother. Don't ever say it again."

Valkenhayn displayed his anger toward that remark.

"You insolent. Who do you think you're facing...!"

"That is enough, Valkenhayn."

The skinny hand took control of the enraged Valkenhayn.

If Valkenhayn had assumed the wolf form, then he would laid bare his sharp fangs and roared. But he was before his master. Valkenhayn withdrew with stern expression.

"...I don't need any escort."

Just as Tomonori turned his back again, he left from Clavis' room for sure this time.

When the inhuman figure disappeared in the hallway of the old castle, Valkenhayn calmly closed the door that had been left open.

The room was soaked with Clavis' sigh.

"Are you fine with it? That man will undoubtedly..."

Go toward Ishana again. This time, it wouldn't have anything to do with Clavis' request.

After Clavis' leaned his back on his wheelchair, he looked up at a gleaming chandelier on the ceiling.

"It is inevitable, Valkenhayn."

The decaying eyelids went down. Within the closed field of vision, Clavis thought about the world. He thought about the history.

"I cannot stop Tomonori. Tomonori is also... a part of humanity."

Thinking, believing, and taking action were the privileges given to humanity. Even if those privileges came from 'danger' that stuck close to the back of Tomonori's 'honesty'.

And it wasn't possible for Clavis to meddle with it. The thousand years of time he spent to gaze at history was coincidently the same thousand years he remained a spectator. Clavis... no, including Rachel, they were beings that existed outside of fate.

"Valkenhayn. ...Just how will mankind live their life in millennia to come?"

Deciding on something, earning something.

The history would continue for a long way to come.

Clavis' eyes already couldn't see the future.

Holding back his words of reply, Valkenhayn prepared a fresh black tea and placed it in front of Clavis. The sweet and abundant rose aroma drifted.

Clavis raised his thin eyelids and gazed at the flickering

amber-colored water's surface.

"Nevertheless, he surely left something troublesome... That Relius Clover."

After he let out a muttering, Clavis took a white teacup in his hand.

Part 4

...This is a dream.

Kazuma had been aware of it as he was in a scene he never saw before.

The scene took place in some kind of a laboratory.

The metallic walls and floors were illuminated by cold, white light. There were flickering green and red lamps from some kind of gauges with great number of them lined up inside the room. Glasses were fitted to a side of the walls in every direction. One could see the other side of the walls without obstruction.

When he came to, Kazuma was there.

Being aware that he was seeing a dream itself was a strange feeling. The stage was different, but this might be the continuation of yesterday's dream.

Just as his blurred self wondered about that, his vision moved. The Kazuma inside the dream looked over his shoulder.

Ahead the moved gaze, there was a figure of young man sitting on a chair while crossing his legs.

"We really going to make use of that guy?"

With an arrogant sound, the Kazuma in the dream spoke.

Just as he thought, this dream was similar to that dream. Although Kazuma had awareness of it, he wasn't allowed to speak as the character inside the dream. It was a dream where he borrowed someone's point of view just to watch the scene.

But the person who was with him wasn't a white-haired young man. It was a blonde man wearing white gown with attire that made him looked like a scientist.

"I'm making use of him since he's useful. He possesses a field of study different from mine. His knowledge and skills are rather interesting. ...Then again, I have already seen those techniques plenty enough."

"The assistant possessing those excellent knowledge and skills seems like a very hardworking person. He secretly went to the secret room, secluded himself, and ended up engrossed with whatever his work, y'know."

"I see... If it doesn't turn out to be a hindrance to my work, then it doesn't matter. In any case, it is not a something of importance."

The tone of the blonde man when he said that was terribly frank. Neither sarcasm nor joke, he regarded the assistant who had been raised as the topic simply just as a 'tool'. There wasn't any human-like enthusiasm in his way of speaking at all.

"Ha!" said Kazuma... rather, the Kazuma in the dream as he laughed.

"Indeed. Well, you did bring along Shuuichirou Ayatsuki. Do whatever you want, Professor Relius."

Shuuichirou Ayatsuki. Relius. Both of them were names that Kazuma had heard. Especially Relius.

What he was reminded of was that Relius Clover was his guardian whose appearance and background were unknown to him.

Could it be that this blonde man was Relius Clover? Kazuma considered examining the face. But before that, the vision inside the dream moved.

The 'someone' who had become Kazuma's point of view once again faced the huge window. From there, spacious lower floor could be seen.

Inorganic floors and walls. Inside of them, a bizarre object had its mouth opened.

Figuratively speaking, it looked like the crater of a volcano.

As if a ring's prong for holding jewelry, there was some squirming stuff like boiling red lava in the place of diamond at the other side of the device.

Staring it, the Kazuma inside the dream bore a weird uplifting feeling as if it was his missed hometown.

"Is that OK?"

"At present, there is no hindrance."

A frank voice answered from behind.

The Kazuma inside the dream placed both of his hands on the gauges which purpose weren't clear and showed a fearless smile.

"Good work, good work. Then I suppose you can afford taking one more request."

"...What is it this time?"

"It's on your field of expertise. ...It also got something to do with the *Azure*."

"Oh?"

There was a slight hint of interest from the blonde man's voice.

As if something was let slipped, 'he' averted his gaze and smiled.

"My next..."

The sound was no longer heard.

Then the scenery blurred.

Everything became incomprehensible.

Eventually, it got darker and turned black.

The dream came to an end abruptly.

Hearing small groan he let out himself, Kazuma woke up.

Opening his thin eyes, there was scenery of room he used to see beyond the troublesome bangs. It was a room of the Mage’s Guild's school dormitory, his own room.

The room was dark and only faint orange light of the bedside lamp was lit. He didn't know the exact time, but it seemed to

be night.

It seemed his had lost consciousness while on the bed. It looked like he had been sleeping all this time. The clothes of his uniform got a bit wrinkled.

He saw a dream.

Just like last night's dream, the dream was in an unknown place and had men he didn't recognized. The details were blur as if they had been rubbed roughly with an eraser. He couldn't remember it well.

Since then... Just how long had passed after he was accompanied by the three people, Trinity, Celica, Nine, and came back here? Placing his hand on his dazed head as he was still half asleep, Kazuma abruptly raised his body.

The horrible condition of his body was already completely healed.

The wound on his left arm was fully recovered without leaving any trace.

"Aah... Again."

In the room which made it hard to breathe, Kazuma removed his gaze from the torn tunic and dropped his shoulders.

He realized about this around two months after he entered the academy. While in class, he cut his finger with notebook paper. In the brief time he was grimacing as the stinging pain ran through, the shallow cut on his skin quickly closed. The small wound disappeared as if it was absorbed.

When he already forgot about it, Kazuma got burned in the middle of alchemy experiment. He went to the infirmary as instructed by the lecturer. But as most of it was already healed

when he arrived, the doctor laughed while saying he was exaggerating it.

In short, even if he got hurt, it would get immediately healed if he left it alone.

At first he thought that everyone else was like that too. But he found out soon that that wasn't the case.

Unlike the memory loss, no one knew about this strange constitution. If possible, he wanted to keep it hidden and unknown to anyone else. The memory loss might stir sympathies, but this just felt creepy.

"I'm glad... that I declined that girl's healing magic."

If the healing which wasn't related to magic had begun to take place, he wouldn't be able to dodge the issue no matter what his excuse was.

As his drowsiness gradually cleared away, his brain slowly started to function.

When he thought about it, series of odd things had happened today. Waking up from a strange dream. Setting Trinity aside, having Celica and Nine kept an eye on him with opposing significances to it. Having his physical condition turned bad without understanding the cause. Got attacked by an assailant also without knowing the reason.

Moreover, as if it finally returned, he had seen a weird dream again.

"Just what is really happening?"

After the complaining voice spontaneously came out, the fatigue spread.

It looked like he saw those dream as the result of his brain adjusting his memories. Might it have something to do with the memories he lost? Is it okay if he assumed that he was remembering something?

As his mind became clearer, he recalled words from the details of the dream he had mostly forgotten.

Shuuichirou Ayatsuki. Relius. And...

"Azure..."

"You interested in *Azure*?"

Someone suddenly replied to the muttering he let out.

His drowsiness disappeared at once. Kazuma turned around with force as if he was repelled from electrocution.

The dormitory's room was a room for one person. There was no one else in this same room and friend visiting here. Besides, he had been fast asleep until a while ago.

There shouldn't be anyone else with the exception of Kazuma. Within the room that should have been empty... an unknown person was there.

The chair that should have been in front of the desk was moved close to the room's wall. ...On top of it, someone was sitting down. The unreliable light from the side lamp made the appearance wasn't clear. Naturally, Kazuma gazed at the staring figure of a person.

It was a thin man. It wasn't clear as he was sitting, but his height seemed about the same as Kazuma's.

Regardless of the darkness, Kazuma couldn't get a look at his face since he was wearing hood low over his eyes. But when

he saw the shown splitting mouth that was like crescent moon, Kazuma became aware of the eerie smile.

"Wh... who? Who... might you... be?"

While still petrified above his bed, Kazuma asked awkwardly.

He got a feeling that he had asked this question just a few hours ago. Unpleasant premonition chilled up his spine.

It couldn't be that he would get suddenly slashed again, could it?

Kazuma reflexively put himself on guard, but pompous gesture, the man only shrugged his shoulders while still sitting and didn't show even pretense to stand up.

"Hey, hey. Really, Kazuma-chan? You seriously said that? What a cold greeting. You don't recognize me?"

"No, uh, sorry. I don't remember that we've met..."

The man spoke like he met an old friend, but Kazuma didn't have any idea about this man.

Within the darkness, the man shook his head in disappointment.

"And I helped you from danger back then, too. So you forget about the person who saved your life? Is Kazuma-chan perhaps an idiot? Maybe stupid?"

As he said it, Kazuma suddenly remembered. Now that he mentioned it, back when the beastkin attacked, there was a voice instructing him on the verge of it.

It wasn't Trinity, Celica, or Nine's voice, but a young man's. If the voice weren't there, Kazuma would have swiftly died from the first stroke of sword.

"From... from back then?"

"Finally remembered? Then again, you still don't know about the important part. Aah, how annoying."

The man grinned, but he quickly sighed in dejection.

Kazuma was at loss since he didn't understand the meaning of what the man said. For some reason, he corrected his posture while sitting on top of bed.

Stretching his long legs forward while still sitting, the man looked at Kazuma with snake-like eyes from his hood.

"Since you passed out on the floor, I purposely came here, y'know? After that, I've been here all this time. Weeell, since you didn't wake up, I got lot of free time. And because this room isn't that decent, I wonder why your mind hasn't gone mad living in here."

"Haa. Well, I've been here for seven years."

Just who is this person? Even while he still had questions, Kazuma moved his mouth while still being dumbfounded by the too unexpected development.

"So, umm, and you are...?"

"Yuuki Terumi."

"Eh?"

"T-E-R-U-M-I. That's my name."

Kazuma felt like there was a strange air about the name. As if there was a special meaning about it...

"So you have it. Say, Kazuma-chan."

Even though he wasn't being pressed in intimidation, Kazuma gulped. For some reason, he suddenly got captivated by this man's words.

The crescent moon mouth smiled.

"So hear me about this again. ...You want the *Azure*?"

Chapter 3: Mind of Azure Deviation

Part 1

When there was no memory, there was no past.

When there was no past, there was a period of time when he wasn't alive.

All this time, Kazuma was always wondering whether he was truly alive.

Just what exactly was the he who was standing here presently? Was he alive or dead? Had he truly been born? Did he really even exist?

Such doubts always plague his mind.

Since the next day, Kazuma's mind was lighter.

When he woke up on morning, putting on uniform, and heading toward the academy he had gone to for seven years,

he was so cheerful. Greeting the morning with such mood was the first time for him to experience it according to his short-term memory.

Usually, he had been living with uncertainty drifting around him. It felt like there wasn't a purpose even when he breathed.

He had wasted the unending time from these seven years only to wonder how deep rootless grass was buried under.

But today was different. No, it would surely be different starting from today.

His memory still hadn't returned and Kazuma still remained an extremely mediocre student. But there was just one big difference.

Kazuma had gotten a 'purpose'.

The reason was originated from last night.

A mysterious man who called himself Terumi had told him. Its existence was only known to limited number of people, but the Azure certainly existed in this world.

"If you can get the Azure, you can take back whatever you want. Everything. Things you lost, things you forgot, whatever."

Terumi's speech was like a tale from a dream.

Bur for Kazuma, it was indeed like a tale from a dream.

"If I have the thing called Azure, I can get my memories back?"

"Idiot. Not only memories. Everything, eeeeeverything. I said whatever it is, right?"

Whatever it is.

He had heard the most tempting phrase.

Until now, Kazuma had never been proactive in remembering his past. It was because he was afraid if he realized that there was no past to remember. And then, he was also afraid if he realized that he absolutely couldn't remember anything.

But if he got the Azure Terumi was talking about... perhaps he might have a chance.

"Azure..."

It was a warm morning. Kazuma was resting his chin in his hands on a desk of the academy's classroom, muttered while he was doing nothing.

Currently he was in the middle of a class with a female lecturer on her desk explaining about an important turning point regarding the history of magic. But as if her voice was distant like the congestion of the city, it never entered Kazuma's ears.

Kazuma's mind was occupied with nothing but the Azure.

Terumi never mentioned the specifics about that object. However, other than it definitely existed, he only gave a guarantee that it would give everything to Kazuma.

Terumi was a suspicious man whose background was unknown and never frankly showed his contentment.

Kazuma also had a thought that there was something wrong with him to just swallow the words of such a man. Normally when he thought about it, such convenient thing that Terumi had spoken of couldn’t possibly exist.

But even if he had doubts about it, Kazuma thought that it was okay even if it was a lie.

The important thing was that he wanted to get his memories back, and that there was a way to do so.

Out of just walking silently every day in the path of ordinary student which Relius Clover had arranged, it might be possible to return to those days as his true self.

It was okay even if it could only inspire such faint hope.

The bell marking the end of the class rang. Kazuma lifted his face as he came to his senses. In the end, there wasn't a single character filling his notebook. He also couldn't recall the contents of the lesson.

If it was the usual, he would have been more or less regretted that he had been dazing around. But today, there wasn't even a tiny amount of that feeling.

The lesson didn't matter. After Kazuma put the unused notebook and pen to his bag, he stood up with determination.

"...I'll search it."

I want to regain my memories back.

I want to know who and what kind of person I am.

It was the first time he clearly thought about that. As it was the first time he thought so, he felt that he was truly living in this world.

First, he must make it his objective to find out just what the Azure was and where it could be found.

Fortunately, this here was Ishana——the Mage’s Guild. The history hidden from the whole world was gathered in this

island.

As Kazuma grabbed his bag, he left the classroom without looking aside.

Cutting across the academy's courtyard and then proceeded to the side of the auditorium, a building with soaring green roof on white wall appeared.

The building with its size approximately as big as a small scale school was the academy-managed Great Library.

Not only for the students, the library was opened for Mage’s Guild's staff members as well as the island's inhabitants. As the book collection consisted of books which weren't expected to survive or exist, it wasn't inferior to other libraries around the world.

It was reasonable for this library to have books that had existed in secret.

The inside was very large, and also very quiet.

The walls were white and there were endless polished stone tiles that went on and on. There were towering bookshelves as far as the tall ceilings. Ladders were placed everywhere in order to get book which was placed at high altitude.

The light from outside couldn't enter at all. All the illuminations were produced by magic. Different from artificial light bulb, the gentle lights gave off a whimsical atmosphere in the entire library.

Ever since the noon recess two days ago, Kazuma didn't attend classes, only going back and forth between the dormitory and here.

He attempted to use the search system for the book collection to look up about the Azure, but he was only guided to books that clearly didn't have any relation to it. Although he looked them over just to be sure, the majority of them were some sort of silly stories. Even if it wasn't like that, he couldn't rely upon the likes of artful writings and poems.

Lores which weren't made public, ancient magic patterns, synthetic table of alchemy. Every religious ceremonies around the world from ancient times. On top of those, the latest technology of science and medical treatment, also the combination between alchemy and science.

Even when he searched for books that came into his mind, it didn't appear they had the right description.

"Not good..."

When he closed the last copy of the book he brought from his countless round-trips, Kazuma's head fell over the desk while he groaned.

It looked like it didn't give any result.

He read books and books, but all of them were wrong. Since this failure couldn't make him to proceed even for one millimeter toward somewhere, he got broken hearted as expected.

"...Does it even exist?"

Azure that is.

He didn't expect to be able to examine it in details, but he

didn't think that he couldn't find even a glimpse of it.

"In the first place, just what 'Azure' is...? It'd be nice if he just told me that much."

While grumbling, he poked the front cover of the book he had closed, feeling irritated.

Creature, substance, device, organization, belief, or concept. He couldn't get a plausible clue about what kind of object the obscure-named Azure was.

As his forehead hit the desk, Kazuma let out a sigh.

"Maybe I should ask Terumi again..."

However, it didn't seem likely for that man to tell him. He had asked various questions regarding the Azure, but in the end, he was told to look it up himself.

(Hmm, but wait.)

For example, in the case if Azure really existed and was an unfathomable technique that could make everything possible. Such ridiculous thing might not just simply be recorded in books.

Moreover, would such books usually get accessed and placed in these bookshelves which the people on the island or anyone else could read?

(If I think about it, it's not strange for it not to be here.)

It was natural if it was treated like classified information. And it sounded more credible, too.

However, even if that was true, what other places should he investigate? Since the books here didn't have information as far as rumors, there was no other way but to aim for the rumor

he heard about the Mage’s Guild's highly classified information next.

(Mage’s Guild's highly classified information... huh.)

Despite the current Mage’s Guild's standpoint, there were things which were considered vital that shouldn't be publicized. Regardless that it was only their existences that were recognized, no one knew about the details.

The way to the deep underground below the Cathedral had secure barrier stretched which wouldn't let anyone other than Ten Sages to trespass. It might be stored there...

"Kazuma-san?"

"UWAH!?"

Tapped on the shoulder from behind, Kazuma, forgetting where he was, let out a hysterical voice.

The impulse made him fell from the chair. In a panic, he clung to the back of the chair and made clattering noise while lifting his face. As he did that, the smiling figure of Trinity was there.

"I'm sorry. Did I surprise you~?"

"I-It's okay. I was just a bit dazed."

Kazuma quickly got a look at his unsightly position. He smiled as if to smooth things over.

Pushing up her large circular glasses with her fingers, Trinity stared at the desk in wonder.

"Were you checking up on something?"

"Aah, yes. Something personal has been on my mind."

While answering without any offense, Kazuma piled up the thrown out books in haste and pushed them to the side of the table.

"Umm. I might sound meddling, but..."

Being conservative while lowering her eyebrows as if she was apologizing, Trinity started with the prelude.

"Today, it seems you didn’t attend the classes. You also didn't yesterday... and the afternoon before, too."

"...So you came to warn me? As one would expect from the well-conducted Trinity Glassfille-san. You don't overlook on your irresponsible fellow classmates."

He unintentionally let sarcasm slipped out.

Not expecting that kind of remark from Kazuma, Trinity looked a bit surprised and had a bewildered expression.

"Well, I have no intention like that. I apologize if I hurt your feeling."

Neatly putting both hands on front of her body, Trinity bowed her head courteously. Her soft platinum blonde hair gently swayed.

"Only... Kazuma-san, until now, you have never skipped classes even for once. I got a little worried in how you're doing~."

"You worried?"

Those words had a strange feeling to it.

How could she feel that way not to herself, but to someone else? Kazuma was baffled. She didn't wish for reward or expecting gratitude. The earnest kindness of Trinity was...

awkwardly warm.

Even though he didn't think he deserved to receive such affection that asked nothing in return.

Unrelated to Kazuma's feeling, Trinity kept a light expression and smiled charmingly like a doll.

"If it isn't troubling you, can I assist you in the matter you're checking on? Since I come here often, I have a rough grasp on the kind of book and its whereabouts."

Hesitating to talk, Kazuma scratched his cheek. He would gladly accept it if the matter he was investigating was related to a lesson. But it wasn't the case. Besides.

"It pains me, but I was just about to finish. Sorry."

"Oh my... it's me who should apologize. It'd be nice if I had called out to you much sooner."

"Ha ha. Looks like it."

While using his laugh to feign ignorance, Kazuma didn't look at Trinity's eyes.

As Kazuma arranged the books and stood up, Trinity asked him with her mind in confusion.

"What were you searching for to make you secluded yourself

in the library for two days?"

"Eh... Ah."

Just now, his body stiffened.

Peeking with sidelong glance, he saw Trinity looking at his direction with a curious look on her face.

She shouldn't have any ulterior motive. He understood that much. But having such pure and innocent eyes directed at him, made him couldn't help but think that she was only pretending to inflict great harm to him.

"Umm... It was something... about my memory."

He couldn't lie, but he couldn’t say the truth either.

However, Trinity didn’t have a slight doubt to Kazuma's vague reply. Putting both hands on her white cheeks, her eyes sparkled as she was both astonished and joyful.

"Oh! Could it be that you've remembered something?"

"No, it's not like that. Only, it seems... there's a way to recover it. But since the method isn't widely known, I thought that maybe I can get some clue."

Kazuma packed the books and arranged it before putting them back to the desk again.

He took a light breath. As he was with Trinity, he wanted to keep things like planning and calculating away.

When she was near, it was like time flowed slower.

Even with a slight hesitation remained in Kazuma's mind, he rubbed them off and opened his mouth again.

"...Can we have a little talk?"

"But of course."

Trinity's soft voice gently urged him.

Kazuma hesitated again... and then he began to talk.

"I haven't given much thought about my memory loss. But when I talked with someone and tried to do something in common... I can't handle it well no matter what. When something like that happens, the memory-less me feels cheated. It felt like my feelings and emotions weren't enough when compared to other person."

The impression he wanted to do was lacking and didn't strike at home. He didn't get the right tuning point.

He had a feeling like an important part was completely left out when his human soul was taking form.

"Sometimes, it feels like I'm different from other people. It'd be preferable if I were superior than the others, but I have a big disadvantage compared to other people. ...I feel like it's only me who don't have a presence."

"It must be... lonely."

Trinity murmured sympathy.

Saying sympathy that didn't have even a slight sarcasm on it seemed like Trinity's virtue.

"Of course I got used to it. It's not like I feels agony every day, you know? ...But."

Couldn't find the right word for it, Kazuma closed his mouth.

However, it was already enough. He felt that his feeling got a

little bit refreshed.

Trinity was the first person he spoke his mind to. It might be because of the air she put, or rather the indifferent silence of the Great Library.

When the warm feeling came to an end, this time as he felt too much of embarrassment, Kazuma seemingly scratched his head roughly.

"Ah."

Suddenly, he had a thought.

When he raised his face, his eyes met Trinity's gaze while she had a blank look. Since Trinity herself couldn't clearly see Kazuma's eyes, it was Kazuma who knew that their gazes had collided.

"Trinity Glassfille-san. If I'm not mistaken, you are a close friend to Nine of the Ten Sages, right?"

"Eh? Yes, that's right~."

"Then can you talk over with her? It's extremely unlikely for the matter I'm searching for to be discovered in this library's books. But if it's the Mage's Guild's highly classified information... if it's the confidential information that's stored inside the Cathedral by the Ten Sages, then...!"

Nine was a Ten Sages. Let alone inspecting highly classified information, she was in charge of it.

Certainly, she wouldn't comply if it was Kazuma who was asking. But she might be if it were Trinity's words. As he felt a slight hope, he lifted his head with a bit of expectation.

"Kazuma-san."

However, even that disappeared with Trinity's single word.

Trinity retracted her sweet smile and had her pink lips tightening. With seriousness that didn't suit her, she stared straight at Kazuma.

"I understand the matter you're searching for is very important to you. I know it's something beyond my comprehension, and I can tell you're really serious about it. But... your request isn't possible."

With meek demeanor, there was firm strength hidden in Trinity's words.

Kazuma sighed in disappointment. He didn't consider that it would go smoothly, but he got depressed after being strongly rejected.

"So it's no good?"

"Yes, it's not possible."

Even then, Trinity still gave a modest smile.

"I'm really sorry that I can't be of help."

"Oh no, forgive me for asking unreasonable things."

If he thought about it calmly, it was unthinkable for the gentle Trinity who also had a strong sense of duty to do something that would hurt her position as a friend. Once he knew it was useless, Kazuma had to think about the next step no matter what.

As he held the piled up books along with his bag, Kazuma lightly smiled in a friendly manner.

"It seems I said a rather strange story. Please forget about it. And thank you for your concern. I will return to the dorm once I

put these books away."

Before he got questioned too many, Kazuma prepared to leave from the spot as if he was fleeing.

Trinity's voice stopped him from doing that. This time, it was the voice he had always heard. A sweet voice that was filled with affection.

"I'm sure Kazuma-san will get those memories back. That's why, please don't be so reckless. I'm willing to give you a hand if I'm capable of it."

Kazuma only looked over his shoulder. He replied with indifferent smile.

He was grateful for her sympathy. But sympathy alone wouldn't let him reach the Azure.

Part 2

When he got outside, the sky had been dyed in bitter orange as if burning before he knew it.

The evening in Ishana which always have clear weather with few rains was lovely. The building and the trees were painted in the setting sun's vivid color.

Retracing his steps back at the academy's courtyard to go to the main school, Kazuma's cheeks got faintly hot as the evening sunlight blazed down on them like it did to the buildings and trees without exception.

Kazuma's manner of walking was nothing like a light walk. His gaze was dropped to the ground and the hand that didn't carry his bag was inserted into the pocket of his trousers.

He had been thinking.

The books that were kept in the Mage’s Guild's Great Library practically couldn't be obtained in other places. They described stuff that was related to magic, sorcery, and alchemy around the world. The description of the past that hadn't been marked down in official history. There was no place but Ishana where such books could be found in any kind of number.

However, it was no good there.

The books in the Great Library were only the surface of the so called hidden part of the world. They were things that had been passed down to humanity without any kind of obstruction; or even, they had to be passed down. There was no Azure among them.

To approach the Azure, an even deeper information was required. Information hidden from the world, placed deep on the bottom.

For example, the Mage’s Guild's highly classified information.

"But such a thing..."

For a common student who didn't have authority like Kazuma, there was nothing that could allow him to inspect those classified information. Unless he was a Ten Sage, he wouldn't be able to do it.

The Ten Sages phrase reminded him of Nine again.

Desperate, maybe he should ask her directly. But he immediately dismissed that thought. It could be said that the possibility for her to pay attention to him was zero. In addition, Nine had strange wariness toward him.

"Haa... What should I do?"

His thin shoulders dropped as he sighed.

Even if the hope called Azure existed, he didn't know how to get to get to the entrance of the method he finally discovered.

Dragged by disappointment, he exited the school gate and headed to dormitory. Disregarding the surrounding scenery while advancing his feet, he approached the alley where he was attacked a few days ago.

He didn't feel like going there alone anymore.

As if seeing unpleasant thing, Kazuma gave it a glance. A figure came out from the alley as if waiting for him.

"Ah..."

Kazuma got surprised and let out a voice.

It was Terumi.

"Hey, Kazuma-chan. Returning from school?"

Standing with burning red sky behind him, his silhouette was fringed with red and black, making it looked sinister for some reason. With the same usual unreadable expression and a crescent moon-like grin underneath the hood low over his eyes, he got close to Kazuma.

"What's wrong? You look like in a bad mood. Something troubling?"

"No. It's not like it's troubling..."

Getting tapped roughly on his back, Kazuma started walking after being urged by Terumi.

Avoiding the alley, they took the road that heading straight to dormitory. Although he didn't really want to be seen by other

people when he was with Terumi, he presently didn't want to go to an even more deserted street.

While walking during the setting sun, Kazuma stole a glance at Terumi.

Terumi was an odd man.

Even though Terumi knew a lot about him, Kazuma didn't know anything about Terumi. However, Kazuma once again felt like he knew Terumi from a long time ago.

Perhaps he got along with Terumi during the forgotten seven years before.

Since he would get dejected if his assumption was wrong, Kazuma couldn't tell it now. But someday... for example, if he could know more about it after getting the Azure, he wanted to have private conversation about Terumi.

Straying from the continuing stone-paved road, Kazuma turned his feet to a public park through an avenue. With the sun shining, the park was bustling with the voices of many children. The nice park was spacious with unobstructed view.

Usually, Kazuma returned to the dormitory by taking a detour from this park. It was because he disliked the merry laughing voices of the children.

But now this annoying laughs gave him relief. Since the children wandered aimlessly in the park like he expected, there shouldn't be anyone brandishing sword swooping down on him.

From the other day's situation, it seemed that beastkin had been avoiding for someone to witness the attack.

"The park is lively... just like usual."

As if grumbling, Kazuma more or less wearily murmured.

He usually only glanced at it from the outside, but the boisterous noise was beyond his expectation.

The children determinedly chasing after a ball as it there was fun in it. With the scene of out of his sight, Kazuma went through the avenue along with Terumi. It seemed this park's lined up trees in this park and its vicinity had been growing from the beginning when the island was established. They grew up considerably big and imposing.

"Though the outside is in danger of world destruction, this island doesn't seem to give a damn at all."

Terumi walked on the same pace as Kazuma and making loud footsteps on the avenue that was paved with stone tiles. He was trying to act like he cared by shaking his head while letting out a sympathizing voice, but he failed badly.

As the lively scene he gave a sidelong glance at didn't make good impression on him, Terumi distorted his mouth and blatantly averted his eyes as if he got bored.

"So, Kazuma-chan."

"Yes?"

"You seem to give the Mage’s Guild's highly classified information quite an attention there."

Terumi began to spoke suddenly.

Kazuma's pace got disordered as he got confused.

"...Did I ever speak about that?"

"Hmmmm, no?"

Teasing him, Terumi smirked. His protruding chin was slightly facing toward Kazuma.

"I know about it. Even if you don't say anything, I know it. I can read what you're thinking after all."

Kazuma's spine got startled to Terumi's voice as if he was threatening a kid. Before he could think it was true, he thought that it was possible if it was Terumi.

After he took a look at Kazuma, Terumi burst into laughter.

"Kukukuku. What, did you take it seriously? Idiot. Of course that isn't possible. I heard you talking about it back at the library."

"Library... Did you mean when I was speaking to Trinity-san?"

"Hmm. So the glasses girl's called Trinity, huh."

Kazuma's face turned bitter as if he had been spat by Terumi's affirmation.

Kazuma felt considerable gratitude toward Trinity who gave him a ticklish stimulus called friendship into his empty every day. Should he laugh at that girl, criticizing her behavior? Or should he laugh along with her?

He almost laughed just now.

"It should've been fine if you just call out to us back then. Eavesdropping is a bad manner, you know?"

"Manner? I did a bad manner!? Shit, you're making me laugh! Hey hey, Kazuma-chan. Just because you got imprisoned in this disgusting island for seven years, don't get so corrupted that you want to become a honorable magician."

"Hey, please don't talk like that in the middle of the city..."

The flustered Kazuma interrupted Terumi's words while being startled at the same time.

What a nerve to just casually spoke ill of Mage’s Guild while treading on the land of Ishana, which was under protection of Mage’s Guild.

Terumi spoke with provocative tone like it was unclear whether he realized it or not, or realizing it but pretended he didn't know about it.

"Besides, you think it's okay if I called you out? The atmosphere was really nice, y'know. Youth is really nice, isn't it~."

"Spare me already. Trinity-san and I don't have anything like that."

Kazuma was bad at that topic. Completely indifferent with Kazuma's tone of voice, Terumi put his hand on his forehead and shaking his shoulders like there was something amusing.

"Hihihi. Hehe, I see. Then again, women are frightening. Generally, they don't care about our intention. Don't you remember? Be careful, Kazuma-chan... Kuku."

"Thank you for the advice."

He was completely ridiculed. Kazuma's mouth was warped as he replied with cold nod.

Nevertheless, the still laughing Terumi still spoke a bit ironically.

"While I'm at it, I'll tell you something. The Mage’s Guild's highly classified information... It surely exists inside the Cathedral. But that thing isn't like what you think."

Kazuma's expression tensed when he heard Terumi's manner of speaking. Couldn't believe it so suddenly, he looked at the hooded man beside him as if peeking at him.

The trees on the public park felt like they rustled in unrest.

"Do you know the contents of the classified information?"

Terumi lightly nodded.

"Yeah, I know I know. Where might that be, hmm?"

"No way. There's only a few person including Ten Sages to know about all of the classified information, isn't it? How can Terumi-san..."

It really didn't seem likely for Terumi to be deeply affiliated with Mage's Guild. No matter how he looked at him, Terumi looked like an outsider. How could he acquire the knowledge of the highly classified information?

Kazuma's voice was clouded with doubt. He looked at Terumi's glaring eyes as if making fun of him.

"What, you don't believe it? Well, I don't really care if you believe it or not. "

"...Then please tell me. What exactly is the Mage's Guild's highly classified information?"

It was true for the Azure, but likewise, he didn't know anything about the matter called Mage's Guild's highly classified information.

Terumi stopped his feet and turned around in a pompous manner at the questioning Kazuma who was testing him.

Kazuma also stopped almost at the same time. It was evening in the public park. While listening to distant sound that was

like from different dimension compared to the merry voices of the children, he faced Terumi.

Terumi showed his usual smile. A smile that ridiculed people.

"You want me to tell you? I'm okay with telling you... But right now, you don't have any business with the classified information."

"I believe I have something to do with it. You were saying you have knowledge regarding the Azure and the classified information, but you didn't tell me the important thing. Even if you say so, I don't have confidence in your words."

"Haa. Kazuma-chan's such a worrywart~."

Kazuma undauntedly talked back to Terumi who was trying to get Kazuma into his pace. Terumi calmly laughed at Kazuma like he was offended by him.

"Don't be afraid. It exists, okay? Rea~lly exists. Maybe saying it a way to reach Azure is closer than saying it as information."

"A way to reach Azure..."

"As for the meaning of it, find it yourself. Don't get people to tell you everything. Like people said, you should be willing to go through struggles. ...Right, Brother?"

As he spoke, Terumi grabbed Kazuma's shoulder and pulled him toward himself. Terumi's fingers were thin, but it dug to the flesh of Kazuma's shoulder with strength that could disrupt the joints.

Terumi looked at Kazuma who was grimacing because of the pain from the surprise attack as Terumi forced him to get close. He then showed a mysterious smile.

"Listen, you need to get to the Azure by yourself. This is what you'd call a fate that can’t be avoided, got it?"

Even if you don't get it, say that you do. With such atmosphere, Terumi whispered in low tone.

Kazuma casted his eyes down as if he got overpowered.

Just what actually is the Azure? To begin with, why is the management on the Cathedral so secure? If it's to protect the highly classified information, then what actually is that information?

Numerous numbers of question accumulated in his chest.

But just like Terumi said, it supposed to be his fate. He must pursue the Azure. No matter how difficult that was.

Still looking downward, Kazuma muttered faintly.

"...Someone that isn't a Ten Sage won't be permitted to get inside the Cathedral. It doesn't seem likely for Mage’s Guild to give permission either.

"Well, thinking about it normally, it's useless to outwit the Ten Sages just by words. It's a purpose the Mage’s Guild has been continually doing for hundreds of years, y'know?"

Even before Kazuma, there should be people who had an interest with the Mage’s Guild's highly classified information for various circumstances. No one had been successful in making contact with the classified information.

Persisting to protect the classified information with obstinate security was why the Mage’s Guild continued to have a great presence in the hidden side of history. The Mage’s Guild's massive history seemed to indicate that it was a symbol of authority's foundation; a symbol that wasn't easy to associate

with.

"But then, what should I do?"

"Use your head a little, dear student. Besides, I'm not much of a thinker."

Terumi who seemed to be really appalled had his mouth distorted. As he started to walk again, his black leather shoes made noises as they trampled the pebbles below which were carried over from the public park by wind.

It seemed the hints were only up to this.

Kazuma dashed to catch up with Terumi. Advancing while giving a sidelong glance to the trees that were planted in regular interval, he kept thinking and concentrating.

The problem lied on the Ten Sages and securities who kept a watchful eye on intruders. They got eyes to see Kazuma, mouth to warn him, and brain to decide his punishment. Unless the obstructing people got away from the Cathedral, he couldn't do much.

"For example... When all the Ten Sages got involved in a situation away from the Cathedral..."

While thinking, Kazuma let out an incoherent muttering.

Beside him, Terumi seemed amazed as he snorted his nose.

"Good thinking... is what I wanted to say. Kazuma-chan, even a kid can think that much, y'know? That isn't the number one problem here. Think harder."

"...I know."

'I was about to think about that just now, so don't interrupt me' was what Kazuma's innermost thoughts bore. He then gave it

a thought again.

An ordinary and inconspicuous student who casually walked and then stopping by the Cathedral. If such situation that wouldn't draw attention happened, he might be able to slip past the Ten Sages' eyes.

(But how can I produce such situation...?)

There was no meaning of it if the situation wasn't a situation that could only be resolved by Ten Sages, not the teaching staff and the town's vigilance committee. Then, his thought was interrupted.

"Aaah. As you're thinking, some dangerous guys got near."

Again, Terumi abruptly changed the topic. He halted his feet beside Kazuma before he could find out the reason.

"What are you talking about, Terumi-san..."

Late in his stop, Kazuma urged him while looking toward the surroundings. Then, he finally noticed.

It should have been the usual period, but there wasn't a single of those annoying child there. It was also true for the parents who were having a pleasant chat nearby. The same for the elders who sat in bench while gazing at the sky in daze.

With the exception of Kazuma and Terumi, there wasn't anyone else in the public park.

Terumi sneered like he was spitting at the thought.

"Not magic. Ars, eh."

"A-Ars?"

"Something like a counterfeit. Simply put, it locks us up inside

this public park."

"Lock us up? Just who...!?"

Even when he returning home by deliberately choosing a path that had a lot of presences, it seemed he would experience strange things again. Kazuma went to panic as he had enough of it.

While Terumi fearlessly raised his mouth, he returned his glance at Kazuma as if urging him.

"Who you say? Well, isn't it them?"

Blocking the avenue on the front and the rear side, three silhouettes of person outfitted with black clothing surrounded Kazuma and Terumi.

Part 3

The park should have been bustling with kid's voices a little while back. Right now, it ominously fell silent.

The laughter, creaking noises of playground equipment, and jarring crying voice disappeared like they were illusions. The surrounding scenery grew dull. It was like the stench of deserted ruin was drifting about.

Standing within the midst of it were Kazuma and Terumi.

And three figures of people who appeared all of a sudden.

The silhouettes of them getting on their stance were very much resembled the person Kazuma encountered a few days ago.

Triangular ears protruding from the head; the swaying long and narrow tails on the back. The whole body was completely

wrapped with black clothes they wore. They wore hood on their head that was low over their eyes and put on a strange black mask as if to conceal their faces.

It was bizarre. But thanks to that, it was easy to guess that those guys had a relation with the beastkin Tomonori from a few days ago.

And even guessing who might be their target.

"Wh-Who on earth all of you are!?"

Kazuma's throat got stiff from what a seemingly screaming voice. He took a step back as if faltered.

Ishana was protected by Mage’s Guild's barrier, so it should make it as the safest city in the world. Nevertheless, it once again suffered an attack in just a short period. Kazuma completely couldn't understand the situation.

On the other hand, Terumi displayed a composed behavior while putting both of his hands into the pockets of his trousers as if he understood the situation.

"How rare. Aren't they half-beastkin?"

"Ha... Half-beastkin?"

"Beastkin is like an incomplete brute that isn't human or animal. But a brute that fails to fall into human or beastkin category is called half-beastkin."

Now that he mentioned it, their heights were certainly tall compared to Tomonori. However, it was too low for a human adult. Their strange imbalance gave off too much of an odd feeling.

The unfamiliar odd feeling turned to fear.

Kazuma dragged his stiffened feet to retreat further. But he couldn't go away as his back hit something.

He thought it was a trunk of the lined up trees, but he was wrong. There was nothing there. There was space between the trees, but it was like as if there was an invisible wall that prevented Kazuma from retreating.

"Only that far you go. You can't get out. I said there's an ars here, right?"

Terumi laughed like he was looking at the stupidity of children toward Kazuma who gasped with shock that was too much like sorrow.

"The cat bastard from before also used that ars, too, back then. Didn't realize it?"

"Ah... That's why at that time..."

There wasn't anyone else on the street.

While curling himself up close to the invisible wall, Kazuma trembled because of the ominous understanding.

He didn't know the name of the executed ars, but it seemed to be a small scale barrier. Perhaps at that time, Nine appeared after she broke that barrier.

In other words, as long as those half-beastkins hadn't canceled the ars or got destroyed by Kazuma, it was impossible to get out from here. But under this circumstance, Kazuma simply couldn't cancel the ars.

As if enjoying this desperate situation, Terumi put his arm to Kazuma's shoulders while grinning.

"Looks like they're involved with the beastkin from the other

day... So, these guys dangerous; whatcha gonna do, Kazuma Kuvaru-kun?"

"Wh-What can I do?"

As Kazuma got flustered and bewildered, the half-beastkins, with strange atmosphere drifting on them, simultaneously leaped.

The distance was shortened in an instant with dull silver cutting the wind.

"Hiee...!"

Kazuma desperately lowered his body and ran. The blade of the half-beastkin instantly diagonally slashed the place where Kazuma was before.

The unhesitating attack made Kazuma quickly became pale.

He was reminded of the other day's attack. They also intended to kill Kazuma without hesitation. Moreover, there were three opponents this time.

One after another, the half-beastkins wielded their respective specialized weapons. One had a sword; the other one took out daggers one by one while another one putting on huge claws on both hands.

The half-beastkin with sword leaped and swung downward in straight vertical line. Daggers were thrown, aiming for Kazuma's escaping feet. As if waiting for Kazuma to escape from it, the third person rushed to attack with claws. It looked random, but it was a good cooperation.

Kazuma rolled over, desperately trying to run from place to place.

As soon as he turned away, the sound of blade grazed his ear. The terror gave him goose bumps.

"Hii... Uwaah... Hah... Hah..."

Standing with his back against the thick wood as if knocking his body to it, Kazuma's disordered breath made his shoulders went up and down furiously.

Why is this happening? That was the only words going round and round inside his head.

"Ooh, ooh. That's a surprisingly skillful dodge."

Terumi's voice resounded unexpectedly close.

Kazuma turned his about-to-cry face. Terumi was sitting on a nearby bench as though it were a refined noon of a holiday, leisurely crossing his legs.

Kazuma complained to Terumi with desperate look while hugging his school bag.

"D-Don't just watch! Help me!"

"Eeh? Me? What a bother."

"How can you say it's a bother...!"

While keeping attention with the half-beatkins' movements, Kazuma pestered Terumi.

But Terumi leisurely dangled his feet while carelessly resting his chin in his hand, watching Kazuma.

"In the first place, even if I don't give you a hand, you can avoid these guys' attacks. Don't you want to get attention? Just play along."

"T-That's..."

After Terumi spoke, Kazuma suddenly had a doubt.

When the beastkin who called himself Tomonori attacked, the slashes always grazed Kazuma's skin, making him felt death appeared before his eyes each time. Still, how could it not resulted in his death back then? There was no explanation outside of good luck and miracle.

But now he felt a little... or a lot depending on the situation, self-composure.

These guys were slow. Much slower when compared to Tomonori.

"...It seems so."

It wasn't easy, but he could avoid it if he observed them. It gave a modest hope for the completely cornered Kazuma. But he immediately realized it didn't turn around the situation in any way.

"But no matter how many I dodge, it's pointless if they're not defeated, isn't it?"

"Aah, right. Sooner or later you'll get tired and may be killed in a slash."

"I-I don't want it to happen...!"

As Kazuma yelled miserably, the half-beastkins attacked in coordination again. The killing intent that was directed to Kazuma only had quite a tenacity displayed.

The slashes of sword and claws approached from the left and right side. As he ran off by making his way between the gap, daggers were pierced into the ground as if obstructing him to

go to his destination.

"Wh... Uwaah!"

Kazuma fell forward because of the sudden obstacle. As a sword was swung downward there, Kazuma rolled over to escape, not minding his uniform to get dirty.

When he raised his out of breath body, he was near the bench where Terumi was sitting.

"I beg of you... Please do something!"

"Hmm, what should I do~? If you're blockhead that can't get the Azure, then you're not necessary for me. Besides, look, fighting isn't my forte."

"You said the opposite a while ago!"

A little while ago, he said that he wasn't much of a thinker.

But toward the sorrowful complain of Kazuma, Terumi teased him like it was completely not his problem without a slight nervousness on him.

"I said that?"

"You did say it! Whatever, it doesn't matter... Hii!"

Whether he had already finished speaking or not, the sound of slashed air rushed.

Grazing the top of Kazuma's head as he squatted while screaming in high pitch, three thrown daggers of the half beastkin pierced the bench behind.

Exactly right beside Terumi.

If Kazuma's reaction were late for a second, his body might be

sewed there by now. It was terrifying thinking about it.

"Hihhihi. I'm joking, I'm joking. Well, it seems I'd get troubled if you were to die."

Like it was really troublesome, Terumi got up from sitting. With half of his waist unable giving out, Kazuma looked up at the standing figure of Terumi as his upper body swayed.

"So... Kazuma Kuvaru-kun."

Terumi casually gripped the half-beastkin's dagger that was stuck on the bench and pulled it. He then tossed it over his head and skillfully caught it while looking at Kazuma from under his hood as if taking a peek.

"It's not interesting to just help you. I got a condition."

"Wh... What is it?"

"Promise that you'll get the Azure."

A low voice like it was creeping up.

As it was certain that the supposedly couldn't be seen glint in Terumi's eyes was shining, Kazuma unintentionally stopped breathing.

It wasn't just breath. Everything felt like they fell into stillness for a moment. In the midst of it, only Terumi's existence that had meaning there.

The feeling was but like staring at a snake. Getting watched by the cold stare, Kazuma's spine froze still. If he were to compare Terumi's eyes, those swords of the assailants felt like toys.

"I-I promise. I mean it. That's why..."

Averting his eyes from the glint directed at him, Kazuma squeezed out his answer. If he didn't answer, he got a hunch that something terrible would happen.

Terumi pulled another knife and grinned.

A fearless and eerie one.

The cold gaze of reptile shifted from Kazuma toward the black clothed assailants.

"Don't forget those words."

No sooner after he spoke, Terumi moved.

He went in between those assailants by walking, and then played the daggers in both hands by rotating them.

The black clothed people must have changed their target as they pointed their blades from Kazuma to Terumi. Each of them assumed alerted posture and approached in irregular movement.

The half-beastkin who carried sword went around behind Terumi, and then swung the sharp blade, aiming his neck.

But at the same time, Terumi turned around with his arm quickly brushed it away. As a dull noise of slash could be heard, immediately a black figure leaped right beside Kazuma.

The bench where Terumi had been sitting on until a while ago got smashed as loud noises rang out.

"Hiiii!?"

"Ooh. My bad, my bad. Careful, Kazuma-chan."

Instead of being flinched, Terumi waved his hand with dagger still in hand.

Currently unable to stand up, Kazuma moved his feeble neck vertically.

"Ye-Yes..."

The answer was the best he could do.

In the meantime, Terumi twisted his body and kicked the claws wielding assailant high up. Then he jumped and slashed the chest of the last person who had thrown daggers from blind spot.

"C'mon c'mon c'mon! Just like this? Hyahhaha! You small fries have to make it more interesting like a small fry can! Man, this is boring!"

The bodies that were crumbled down under his feet were like lumps of shadow. He kicked them like a ball or something else entirely before stomping on them.

Even though it was three against one, Terumi's strength was overwhelming.

While assuming no stance just like when he stood in the middle of downtown, he definitely had seized and counter attacked the approaching assailants. Also, it was one crude movement like he was casually showing off his ability.

"Kuh... Move out! Report to Tomonori-sama...!"

As someone who seemed to be the leader raised his voice, the assailants began to pull back. They jumped back before disappearing from the public park.

The vicinity once again regained the tranquility of dusk.

Terumi tossed away the daggers on both of his hands like they were toys he had lost interest with. Then he walked up to the still sitting Kazuma, stretching out his foot and poked him with the leather shoe's tip.

"How long will you keep sitting, Kazuma-chan~. Is your hips giving out?"

"Y... You're really strong, Terumi-san."

Raising his eyes at Terumi who were looking down on him from a high position, Kazuma spoke with a weak voice that surprised even himself. Terumi's shoulders were shaking as he burst into laughter.

"Strong? You said I'm strong? That's so obvious. Well, you'll eventually get it back though."

"Me? What is it that I'm getting back?"

"Khukuku. Like I said, you'll understand soon enough."

Terumi grabbed Kazuma's arm while laughing and pulled him. He slapped the shoulder of the petrified Kazuma who was still holding his bag tight and made a crescent moon shape on his lips.

"Don't forget the promise."

"Promise..."

"Hey hey, that's not good. Are you pretty much still only half awake?"

The arrogant voice reverberated on Kazuma's willpower.

Strength was put into Kazuma's arm that was hugging his bag. Forceful, like it was crushing his arm.

"...It's fine. I'm not forgetting about it."

Fooling the Ten Sages' eyes and entering the Cathedral. He had to obtain it.

The Azure that is.

For that purpose, Kazuma was willing to do anything.

Kazuma didn't realize it, but he thought about it as his last resort.

Afterwards, Kazuma and Terumi separated in front of the dormitory.

Terumi stood still in front of the dormitory for a while. Before long, he abruptly looked up over his shoulder.

There was a three stories residence stood up near the dormitory. A figure was standing on the rooftop. The height was small; the long tails were the most characteristic of all, but its silhouette emerged as it got basked by the setting sun.

It was Tomonori.

Standing on the rooftop, Tomonori stared at the dormitory with

eyes that were aiming for a prey. Until just now, he must have been focusing on the vanishing figure of Kazuma there.

He might be waiting for the chance to kill him. Or else, he might be making sure of something.

Either way, it was only an eyesore for Terumi.

Tomonori slightly moved. His large eyes moved for a bit, staring at Terumi who was standing in front of the dormitory.

The distance where they were glaring at each other was somewhat far. But disregarding such a thing, Terumi and Tomonori were aware of each other's existence and their obvious hostility.

But this time, the distance didn't get shortened further. Tomonori turned his heel; and like an olden spy from a faraway island country that was currently in ruin, he became a shadow and disappeared in an instant.

The cat's presence had completely disappeared, yet Terumi glared upward at the uninhabited rooftop.

"...Tch."

He clicked his tongue in annoyance.

Whatever. It has already begun anyway.

The gears have engaged and started to move. It can't be stopped anymore even if they struggle.

Part 4

As dinner on the dormitory came to end, Kazuma went back to his room without speaking to anyone else.

After turning on the lamp in the dark room, he closed the door.

An ordinary room with ordinary furniture lined up. But for Kazuma, it was the most calming place.

Boiling hot water in a small pot, he brewed black tea. It was a poor quality one he bought at a shop in the main street of the island, but it was enough for Kazuma.

After blowing his breath to cool it, he had a sip. And then, he unconsciously sighed.

He had to experience something unpleasant again today. Although it went well as he was fortunately together with Terumi, Kazuma wondered what would happen if he was alone.

There was something with his surroundings lately.

Celica A. Mercury, a beastkin, and Terumi appeared. Today, even half-beastkins also appeared.

And then the Azure.

"Azure..."

He had to think some kind of a plan.

Ten Sages were a given prestige that made them considered as the most excellent magicians among the Mage’s Guild; it was also a social status. If they had to act, it would require an incident with a level that simply couldn’t be resolved by other magicians.

Nonetheless, the one who would initiate the plan was Kazuma.

An incident that couldn't be resolved without Ten Sages, but also one that Kazuma could realize.

"Dammit... There must be something."

He unconsciously spoke rude to himself.

Then... a knocking resounded on the room's door.

Kazuma raised his face and frowning. The time was late as it had already beyond dinnertime. Even while disregarding the time, he had no idea who would visit his room.

"Yes?"

It might be Terumi, he thought.

But the returned voice from the other side of the door was different.

"I'm sorry since it was so sudden. It's Trinity Glassfille."

A voice as sweet as marshmallow. Kazuma couldn't immediately grasp the meaning of the words he had heard. Several seconds being absent minded later, he hurriedly opened the door.

The figure there made Kazuma stopped thinking once more.

Without a doubt, Trinity Glassfille was there.

It was prohibited for girls to visit the boys' dormitory, but such a thing was practically rare.

The spectacle of Trinity, who was famous for her good conduct in the academy, to be alone in the hallway of boys' dormitory felt out of place one way or another.

"Thank god, you're safe."

Looking at Kazuma, Trinity brushed aside the discomfort with a sigh of relief as her expression began to smile broadly.

"Huh?"

What did she mean by safe? Still with the door opened, Kazuma asked a question in return with a surprised and dull face.

Putting both her hands together on her mouth, Trinity bashfully smiled.

"Aah, sorry~. The truth is, this evening, just like when Kazuma-san was attacked before, Nine said that she sensed unusual force... So I thought perhaps something happened to Kazuma-san~."

"And then you went out of your way coming here at this time?"

A truly whimsical person. Kazuma went out to the hallway while amazed.

Fortunately, there wasn't anyone else in the hallway.

Since Kazuma's room was at the most end, there shouldn't be anyone passing there and got in the way. But since there was just the two of them in a secluded place, with the girl being the same age as him, the circumstances made him felt a quite sensitive mood.

"I'm really sorry. But no matter what, it's been on my mind."

As she spoke, Trinity's gentle eyes looked like as if they miraculously saw through everything.

How could it be? Such a thing shouldn't be possible, but it was like the bottom of Kazuma's heart that he didn't even aware of was being scooped up. Kazuma confronted her with a forced smile.

"I'm sorry for troubling you. But it's all right. Nothing was

happened."

Kazuma decided to keep quiet about being given a hard time by black clothed people. He felt awkward to cause further worry to Trinity who somehow couldn't help but felt concerned. Above all, he wanted to avoid a situation where he had to speak about Terumi.

He didn't want unrelated person to know about Terumi and the Azure.

"Is that so? Thank goodness."

Trinity whispered quietly.

After hanging her head for a moment, she reservedly raised her face.

The green eyes affectionately stared at Kazuma.

"Umm~. Kazuma-san."

It was Trinity's sweet voice he had always heard. But there wasn't only sweetness in there. A dignity that seemed suppressing the noise on the surrounding was drifting about.

That purity also pulled Kazuma's consciousness as if being prompted gently.

"If you're being caught in some kind of trouble, then I'll lend you my strength. So please, at least don't do dangerous thing."

"Eh...?"

"I don't know anything about the circumstances surrounding you. However... I can't help but feel that there has been some kind of unrest around Kazuma-san these days."

While she said that she didn't know about it, her words totally hit the mark.

Kazuma's heart jumped. But at the same time, various kind of emotions swirling within him

It was pleasant to receive this kind of genuine care, but it was shameful to be seen helpless like this.

He felt guilty to deceive Trinity from here on. If he were to trick Nine, it would be like he also betrayed Trinity.

He missed the ordinary, inconspicuous dull life of a student and her greetings on every morning.

When Kazuma's wish were to come true, the same as always scene wouldn't be there anymore. For a little. Just for a little...

"You needn't worry... about me."

Covering the emotion that was too much to handle, Kazuma gently slackened his cheeks.

He had grown used to make a smiling face, but it felt slightly painful when the other party was Trinity. It was like he paid back her pure sincerity with impure faithlessness.

However, Kazuma continued.

"I don't particularly get caught up with anything. I have no clue regarding what Trinity-san is speaking of. Certainly, I had a dangerous experience on the other day... but that was all. I'm all right."

Toward Kazuma who spoke like he was persuading her, Trinity watched him intently without averting her eyes even for a little. Not even a sign of doubt appeared on her crystal clear green eyes.

"...I'm relieved to hear about that."

But somehow, her presently expressed smile appeared to have relief while simultaneously had sadness, too.

Taking a step backward, Trinity bowed politely with a behavior that was as gentle as her tone of voice.

"I'm glad I summoned my courage to come this far to see you. Thank you for showing your face. Excuse me for coming so late~."

"It's okay. Be careful on your way back, Trinity Glassfille-san."

Trinity bowed her head once more, left a well-mannered smile, and then slowly returned to the hallway.

After seeing off Trinity's leaving figure, Kazuma turned back to his room.

As if snatching his consciousness, the passing by Trinity's seemingly sad smile lingered in his chest.

Did she see through the lie Kazuma had told her? If that was the case, then why didn't she question him?

After closing the door and locking it, Kazuma hit his forehead at the door.

She had especially come all the way here. Since it would have been easy, maybe at least he should have given her a word of thanks.

"——Hey hey. Don't tell me you just gonna swallow that woman's words?"

From behind Kazuma, a scornful voice jumped at him like cold water.

It was like being snapped out of dream in a single breath. Kazuma turned around with inconceivable feeling.

There, just like the first time they met, Terumi sat on a wooden chair, acting like he owned the place.

"P-Please don't surprise me. Just where did you come from!?"

His waist gave out from too much of a surprise. With Kazuma's back clung to the door while miserably complaining, Terumi happily laughed while sitting on top of the chair.

"Khukuku. I dunno what you mean by that, but it's really funny. I've been here from the beginning."

"But that..."

'Can't be possible', was what going to be his retort; but Kazuma swallowed the words in the middle of it. When Terumi first appeared, there was never any common notice.

If Terumi was saying it, then perhaps he was truly had been in this room from the very beginning. But Kazuma just didn't notice it.

For some reason, the air around Terumi gave an impression like that.

After separating his back from the door, Kazuma walked slowly before sitting down on the edge of his bed.

Before he knew it, Terumi was drinking the black tea he brewed some time ago on his own. It would have become

lukewarm anyway, so Kazuma didn't feel like making his way to get it back.

"What did you mean when you said not to swallow Trinity-san's words?"

Joining his hands together on the opened gap between his knees, Kazuma looked at Terumi.

Both Kazuma's long bangs and the hood Terumi put on low over his eyes were concealing their eyes. But strangely, their sights clashed spontaneously.

Terumi, holding the cup by hooking it with his fingers, drained its contents as he gulped them.

"I told you not to just swallow it, right? But... was she called Trinity? Well, it doesn't matter. Do you think it's okay to really trust that woman?"

"Why are you saying such a thing? She is just worried."

Unable to comprehend the meaning of Terumi's words, Kazuma criticized Terumi like he was irritated.

Looking amazed and in sympathetic tone of voice, Terumi exaggeratedly shook his head.

"Oh man, you poor, poor thing. You've been living a lukewarm life in this ignorant, peaceful island. But I guess it can't be helped. Stupid people will get taken advantage of, used, and dumped in the end, y'know?"

"What are you trying to say...?"

When he was speaking that far, Kazuma got more and more uneasy. Toward Kazuma who glanced quizzically, Terumi gave him unpleasant smile with his usual tone of voice.

"You really don't notice? That woman is monitoring you."

Monitoring.

The unexpected word froze Kazuma's thought.

Terumi rudely put back the cup to desk. The coarse noise made Kazuma got back to breathing.

But he simply couldn't get back to being calm.

"Monitoring... Trinity-san... at me?"

"Who else is there?"

"But why..."

"You don't have any idea? Really? Even one? ...Really?"

Terumi's voice fueled the suspicion that began to grow in Kazuma. The gradually growing suspicion grew larger as he would find something if he searched the memories of the past few days.

"Remember... *Kazuma Kuvaru*."

Terumi's words shook his mind.

The awfully sharp gaze of Nine who was cautious against Kazuma. Those eyes that were like they were groping for Kazuma's innermost thoughts one-by-one. She was a Ten Sage after all. It wouldn't be a miracle even if she guessed something.

And then Trinity. Inside that undiscriminating and tender smile she wore, what kind of face did she have? She was hidden in Nine's shadow, but she was the excellent Platinum the Trinity.

"Trinity-san is... monitoring me..."

It wasn't like the mutter was directed to anyone, but Kazuma acknowledged it. It spread on his heart in a flash. The gratitude and obligation he held toward Trinity until now were dyed in black.

It was hard to believe.

However... was it possible to say that there was absolutely zero chance of her giving such harmless smile while monitoring every single of Kazuma's move?

While casting his eyes down with his crossed fingers biting the back of his hands, Kazuma held a distinct suspicion.

Chapter 4: Doubt of Yellow Equilibrium

Part 1

It was deep in a remote forest.

Excluding the people who lived there, no one knew about it.

In such a place, there was a small village.

The people who lived there weren't humans. They were beastkins... To be exact, cat-type beastkins who had root of lineage in the now defunct Japan.

The inhabitants already slept as the night had gone deep. With fires burning on the village's surroundings to repel wild animals, the cracking noises of orange-colored flames were played during the stillness like an instrument.

In the basement below a small building inside the village,

there he was.

The room, which was surrounded by stone wall, was unpleasantly cold; it was covered in complete darkness. Walking with a lantern that was lit with fire, only him and his surroundings that were wrapped with the warm, faint light.

On the walls that were almost assimilated with the darkness, silhouette of a short person was swaying.

Even if it was a human, it only got the height of children. However, there were large, triangular ears on top of the head and a long tail which was split in to two parts on the back. It was a cat-type beastkin with grey fur, Tomonori.

With silent footsteps as he advanced inside, only flickering fire in the lantern engraved his slow pace.

Arriving on the inner part of the room, Tomonori stopped. He placed the lantern he held to his side.

A flat, lengthy box made of paulownia tree was enshrined there. For a several seconds, Tomonori stared at it, and then he gently undid the seal.

Inside it was a single sword. Compared to the pair of short swords Tomonori usually handled, the sword was larger by far.

It was sheathed in black scabbard and sealed tightly by the sword strap.

Tomonori grabbed that sword. As if severing the intense hesitation, he took it out from the box.

"...What do you want?"

With the grabbed sword hanging in the air, Tomonori suddenly

talked.

That inquire was directed to the presence behind him.

He found out about it by the scent, even without looking back.

The presence was looking at Tomonori's back from the entrance of the small room that was hidden underground. The standing still figure had similar small build of silhouette as it was a male cat-type beastkin. He had white fur with tawny spots; a two-tone pattern.

The name of the man was Mitsuyoshi. The older brother of Tomonori.

"What're ya plannin' to do with that?"

Without entering into the room, Mitsuyoshi asked with calm voice.

This room was hiding things considered important for the village; a room dedicated for safekeeping. With trespassing without reason being the obvious, taking out the object inside without permission was violating the village's law.

While it was a scene where someone should get blamed properly speaking, Mitsuyoshi didn't raise his voice. With somewhat amazed looking pretext, he asked again.

"Ya know what kind of sword that is, right?"

"...Hihi'irokaneTime-Killing Sword."

Hihi'irokane

It was a secret sword that when wielded, it held the power not just to cut flesh, but also eventually sever the dwelling spirit.

However, this sword wasn't just that kind of object.

It existed from long ago. Tomonori and Mitsuyoshi's clan had inherited it for generations.

Until six years ago, Tomonori and the others had been living in a mountain village in Japan. Likewise, the mountain was a passed down plot of land from the old days. Compared to this village, far larger number of cat-type beastkins had lived there.

However, that life had been severed by the Black Beast.

In order to defend the old village land, many numbers of warriors had challenged the Black Beast, and fell. Because of the large-scale nuclear strike, the old village's mountain had gone burnt and demolished.

Tomonori and the other cat-type beastkins parted with most of their brethren as they made their escape to a continent. Here, they had been building a small village while living quietly.

Someday, they would obtain the peaceful land from those days once more and restore the undying long history.

He strongly believed so.

"That's the treasure of our clan, foundation... an' our old village's symbol."

Mitsuyoshi spoke as quiet like the engraved shadow in the room.

Just like the time when they had been living in the now formless old village, this sword alone had been taken care of. Among the villagers, this sword was believed as the old village's symbol. The number of people who survived the days of despair while holding that belief wasn't small.

Still gripping his clan's old village's sword, Tomonori dropped his arm to the side of his body.

Without looking back at the older brother, he replied with stiff voice.

"...Wherever everyone is living on, then that'd be the home. Sword is a weapon. And weapon... has a role."

"What's the role of that fellow?"

"To cut the evil that threatens the world."

"What's the evil that threatens the world?"

"The man I must kill."

Answered unhesitatingly, Tomonori moved his gaze to the sword he held. Different from the short swords, it emphasized its presence heavily.

Hihi'irokane. A sword beyond all definitions of space-time that could also sever spirit.

"This sword is required to kill that guy. If not this sword... there won't be a meaning on it."

As the words of his younger brother hinted an awfully strong determination, the glint on Mitsuyoshi's eyes slightly turned sharp. As if he was weighing Tomonori's intention.

"...This ain't Clavis' instruction, is it?"

Tomonori answered with cold, unwavering voice.

"Of course. This is my will."

"If ya act on yer own convenience, ya will lose somethin' equally big. Surely ya understand, right?"

"I'm not Clavis' servant."

Mitsuyoshi was righteousness. Tomonori was faith.

It appeared their words indicated and matched the resolution they abided in their heart.

It had been this way for a long time. Mitsuyoshi and Tomonori couldn't understand each other. Even while they were aware of the burden that was decided for each other and respected each other's feeling, but still, they couldn't live in the same way.

The questioning Mitsuyoshi and the replying Tomonori extremely aware of it from long ago.

Therefore, Mitsuyoshi knew well that he wouldn't be able to sway his brother's faith no matter what kind of words he used. Undoubtedly, he himself possessed something that couldn't be distorted just like Tomonori.

"...Tomonori. Ya goin' alone?"

"Of course."

"But yer opponent is the kind that makes ya need to get Hihi'irokane. Ya still doin' it?"

"I don't need any hindrance."

Tomonori's reply was cold. But inside his mind, there were the figures of half-beastkins who had done many missions along with him as his subordinates.

They were incomplete people. Not human, or beastkin to say either. They were rejected mixed breed who didn't belong to any society.

Had no place to go, Tomonori aided them while Mitsuyoshi resolved to shelter them. Since then, the protected half-

beastkins worked as Tomonori's subordinate, fighting along with him.

If they were aware that Tomonori went alone, they would most likely grieve. However.

"...If I take them along, those guys will lose their lives."

As if he didn't intend for anyone to hear it, Tomonori muttered in low tone.

No matter what their appearance was, no matter what their race was, they were living because they had been born. Especially since the half-beastkins never knew peace and weren't permitted to establish as a species.

He himself must not have been a good leader. Even so, he couldn't bring himself to involve their lives for his selfishness.

"There's no time. You too, you mustn't been planning to loiter in a place like this."

Tomonori turned on his heel as if to shake something off.

Mitsuyoshi slightly twitched the tip of his nose.

During this time, Mitsuyoshi also had a different duty. It was to investigate that person.

The target of his investigation was Relius Clover. The man who Clavis tracked the records of and had something to do with the appearance of Black Beast.

"If you're going to assist me, I need none of it. This is my path."

After he told it, Tomonori started walking with sword and lantern in hands. Although he noticed the older brother's figure on the edge of his vision, he didn't focus on it.

There was other thing that he should focus on. He had that kind of expression.

"Tomonori."

Mitsuyoshi spoke while they were passing each other.

Mitsuyoshi also didn't take a better look at his younger brother. As if yielding to the room's entrance, he leant his back on the wall, staring at the empty paulownia box which stored a sword until a while ago.

"Since ya made up yer mind, I won't stop ya. So definitely... bring him down."

"...That is my role."

Definitely, whatever the outcome would be.

He would kill that man.

Holding killing intent and sense of duty that were like blades in his chest, Tomonori ran straight to Ishana during the dead of night.

Part 2

Today, Ishana was blessed again with fine wheather.

It was the after school as the class had ended. While holding his bag on his hand as he had finished the preparations for returning home, Kazuma looked out of the window in the hallway.

From there the academy's courtyard could be seen clearly. What Kazuma was looking was a small building peeking from the opposite side of the thick bushes and large trees, the Cathedral.

There, the Mage’s Guild's highly classified information was stored. Among them, there was information related to the *Azure*.

The more he thought about it, the thought toward the Azure inside Kazuma grew stronger.

(Cathedral... Cathedral...)

Leaning on the window frame as he put his arms on it, Kazuma viewed the Cathedral while biting his thumb.

What would be the best way to get it there? Be it waking or sleeping, he had only been thinking about it.

Since it had come to that, he found out signs of tenacity within himself. It was the first time for him to experience obsession.

"What are you looking at~?"

From behind, Trinity's gentle voice could be heard. Kazuma turned around quite smoothly.

"Just the outside. I thought the weather is nice."

While answering Trinity's gentle smiling face with forced smile, Kazuma secretly took a breath.

Was it the usual and same normal attitude from her? That thought made him worried.

Terumi's words resounded in his mind.

——*That woman is monitoring you, ain't it?*

(Trinity-san is monitoring... me...?)

If that's the case, the greeting just now might be a part of the monitoring.

It was like there was another face underneath his face. While showing a smile that appeared on the surface of his face, underneath it was a face that kept attention to Trinity's every movement like he mustn't overlook even a slight fault.

"It seems so. The weather is nice that it brightens the mood~."

"Yes, exactly."

His mouth fluently let out cheap words. Despite that the inside of his chest was filled with suspicion, he weaved conversation like he was the same friend as he had been until yesterday.

Not showing any sign of doubt toward Kazuma's distrust, Trinity pulled her chin a bit and straightened herself again.

"Umm, Kazuma-san. Today, after this, do you have any plan?"

"Plan?"

While putting a casual voice, Kazuma secretly frowned beneath his bangs.

Why was Trinity minding about his plan? The snake of suspicion, which had been coiling on the bottom of his stomach, raised its head.

"No, I don't have any particular plan. I'm just going to return to the dorm."

He didn't actually have any plan, but he answered carefully to not give even a slight chance.

But Trinity turned shy while looking delighted, and then she narrowed her clear green eyes.

"If so, is it okay if I invite you?"

"...Huh?"

It was unexpected words. Kazuma couldn't keep up in understanding it and asked again in dull tone of voice.

Trinity's shoulders shook as she chuckled. Even now, her soft laughing voice was like fragrance of sugar and flowers drifting about.

"Like I said, it's an invitation. If you don’t mind, Can we have a tea together?"

"By tea... Are you inviting me to drink tea?"

"Yes."

Trinity nodded gently.

As for Kazuma, he couldn't give a reply while his eyes wandered around.

He couldn't make sure of Trinity's true intention. He could follow as much as listening for the plans of the monitoring target. But as for the extent after that, there shouldn't be any significance unless she restricted the target's freedom. If she didn't do so, then she wouldn't be able to investigate where the monitoring target was going and what he did.

No. Trinity's monitoring was probably not to investigate Kazuma's action, but might be to restrain Kazuma's action. If that was the case...

"Umm, are you unwilling to accept it?"

As Trinity's voice suddenly heard, Kazuma hurriedly made a smiling face.

It was plainly suspicious to refuse the tea invitation immediately after replying he had no plan.

Kazuma quickly shook his head.

"No, absolutely not. I was just a bit surprised. It's because I never considered receiving tea invitation from someone like Trinity Glassfille-san."

"Fufu. Actually, me too."

With the hand that wasn't holding her bag, Trinity touched her cheek which was like dyed in light pink color.

"I felt a little nervous to invite a man, even if he's a friend."

"What do you... mean by that?"

As he expected, he couldn't grasp her intention. Toward Kazuma who inadvertently had questioning look, this time, Trinity put the hand which had been on her cheek to her mouth and let out a short laugh.

"It's a secret~."

"Secret? But..."

"Okay then. Now that it has been decided, let us go. The other two should have already gone ahead."

With sweet fragrance drifting about, Trinity tenderly held Kazuma's hand. He got pulled with her still urging him.

"Wha-, wait, Trinity-san...?"

Even when he raised a confused voice, Trinity only gave cheerful smile.

He could escape if he shook off her hand. Such option came to his mind, but he couldn't do it.

Suddenly, they faced the entrance after getting down on the stairs. While doing it, Kazuma frowned because of a question which was different from the questions he had so far.

Just now, did Trinity say... 'the other two'?

"So... Why am I here..."

After his mind finally calming down again, Kazuma showed a stiff smile while feeling compelled to complain.

Trinity dragged Kazuma's arm and brought him to a solitary café which was just next from the main street of the island.

The store had charming appearance with bricks decorated on a white wall. The entrance's surroundings had a numbers of planters which were planted with colorful flowers lined up there. Identical, the interior also had white walls irregular brick-like tiles as ornaments; the area by the windows enshrined brightly colored potted flowers.

The guests and employees in the store were nothing but females. Kazuma was the only exception there.

"Why you say? Isn't it because I took you here?"

While putting a sugar cube to a royal milk tea that was full of milk in front of Kazuma, Trinity gently smiled.

There were two other persons beside Kazuma who encircled a round table along with her.

On the Kazuma's left side Kazuma was a person who had a huge smile seeing her caramel and nuts cake and lemon tea, Celica.

On the right side, Nine was sitting with a chocolate cake,

which looked sweet just by looking at it, and a hot coffee which was placed beside the cake.

The expected appearance of the 'having tea' was exactly what Kazuma feared as a sensitive atmosphere was flowing about.

By the way, there was a dish of rare cheese cake beside Trinity's royal milk tea; but in front of Kazuma, there was a straight and baked cheese cake placed.

"No, not about that. Err... Why did I get invited to drink tea with Trinity-san and the others?"

It felt too extreme even for saying it was out of place. If it wasn't an invitation from Trinity, he would suspect it as a tasteless harassment.

While stirring her lightly colored black tea with a spoon, Trinity meekly smiled.

"Since Kazuma-san looked down recently, I thought for having a change of pace~. I don't know what man would prefer, so I'm sorry if you don't like joining our hobby..."

"Just... that?"

Smoldering suspicion made Kazuma asked again.

Trinity put her fingers on her cheeks and thought a little.

"After that... I thought that if having a tasty cake would be nice. Ah. Perhaps this is bothering you?"

"N-Not that. Ha, haha..."

As if Trinity's worried face suddenly noticed, Kazuma laughed to cover it up.

(Only worried...? It mustn't only just that.)

Trinity was supposed to monitor Kazuma. Probably at the instruction from Nine.

But as if relieved by Kazuma's answer, there was affection showed in Trinity's relaxed eyes which was unthinkable to direct it to her monitoring target.

Trinity was always gentle. Not only Kazuma, everyone who knew her must be feeling it. It was unimaginable to think there was lie in her affection. ...He didn't want to consider about it if he could.

(But...)

Terumi had told him.

Couldn't comprehend it, Kazuma put his spoon and stirred the light brown liquid of his black tea even though no sugar had been put there.

Suddenly that hand stiffened.

Beyond his gaze as he inadvertently raised it, Nine's fingers, which were beautiful to the nails, were hooked to a small handle. Without even a slight hesitation, she raised the milk pitcher for her coffee to the sky and slowly turned it upside down in one go, pouring the milk into her cup down to the last drop.

And then one-by-one, she dropped the sugar cubes which were provided on the table. The contents of the bowl that had sugars decreased in a blink of eye.

"...Umm."

Unintentionally, the confusion went out as a voice.

As much to say that Nine didn't speak with friendly voice, she

gave a sharp gaze to Kazuma.

"What?"

"Oh, no. That..."

Any answer would be good. When Kazuma's mouth got stiffened as he desperately thought something, Celica called a passing waitress.

"Excuse me, can I have gum syrup?"

"Ah, yes. I'll get it right away."

Kazuma was at loss with words.

Without any resistance, the female waitress brought a small pitcher filled with gum syrup. Naturally it was placed in front of Nine; and naturally, Nine put it into her coffee.

Not a single drop remained of course.

Presently, the coffee inside her white cup had been transformed into something murky white with sweet aroma oozed; the water level went up to the rim, almost spilling.

Like it wouldn't get spilled, Nine stirred it with a spoon.

(...Seriously?)

Kazuma slowly put his hand on his mouth.

It didn't mean that Kazuma disliked sweets. However, this was an exception. It was a story of another world.

Celica cheerfully laughed when she discovered that Kazuma got solidified by Nine's shocking behavior.

"Ahaha. Surprised? Onee-chan unexpectedly got a sweet

tooth."

"Sweet tooth..."

Kazuma got very uneasy when he thought whether it was okay to dismiss it with those words. But he thought that he should stop arguing about that here as he had no ally in this.

Celica being the obvious, together with Trinity, and even the waitress who brought gum syrup, they accepted it because it was a common scene.

"This particular amount should be normal. Don't worry, I'm doing it properly."

Nine spoke as if nothing happened, all while raising the cup with astonishing sense of balance.

(It's absolutely not normal! There's no meaning if the coffee's flavor is gone, isn't it!)

As he endured his desire to let his voice out, Kazuma could only give a feeble smile.

Trinity added a few words as if to deliver the final blow.

"When Nine's feeling tired, she would drink things like gum syrup directly, you know. When she had done so, she said her head got properly working~."

"...Haa, my head..."

He couldn't comprehend what a genius could do. Kazuma came to that conclusion in his innermost thought.

"See, rather than the dorm, Onee-chan and I live in a house on the island. The house is in this neighborhood. That's why we often come here on the way back from academy just to have tea. Since we do it each time, we got known by the

people of this shop."

Seemingly enjoying it, Celica, while wryly smiling, bent herself toward Kazuma and looked at him like as it was a secret talk.

Kazuma backed out about twice the distance she approached him.

"O... ooh. I-I see."

Almost reflexively, he averted his eyes. He wasn't very good to have his eyes stared.

Besides, it might be his feeling, but since the time Celica was sitting beside him, indescribable fear assaulted him. As discomfort crawled from his spine to the back of his neck, he could feel nausea just by swallowing his saliva.

Of course, it wasn't because of what had been done to Nine's coffee.

Not noticing Kazuma's bad shape, Celica pierced a fork to her cake and stuff her cheek with a mouthful bite. Firmly closing her eyes and grasped the fork tightly, she groaned happily.

"Mmm~, delicious. Kazuma-san should also eat it, c'mon. The cake and tea is reaaaaally tasty."

Toward Kazuma who wasn't having his tea or cake, Celica urged him with sparkling eyes.

Beside her, Trinity wrapped her cheeks with both of her hands and was taken aback as she looked at Kazuma.

"Could it be~, you dislike sweet food? My apologies~."

"No, not at all. I like it. I was just puzzled by the situation just now... I'll eat now, then."

Kazuma smiled while controlling the feeling of exhaustion that would make him collapse. Hooking his fingers to his cup, he drank the tea that had its refined aroma rising.

It surely must have tasted good.

But on Kazuma's surroundings, there were three people. Nine who held a drink that he wasn't sure if it's okay to call it coffee anymore while looking at his direction with sharp eyes. Celica who strangely made him felt sick just by being near her. And Trinity who was possibly monitoring him.

As he was 'having tea' while being surrounded by them, it was like he didn't have the proper feeling to enjoy the tea's taste. The poor quality tea he drank in his room was very much more relaxing.

(Really, how did this come to happen...)

Presently in this baffling situation, Kazuma didn't even know what kind of expression would be good to make.

Part 3

Leaving the dumbfounded Kazuma alone, the girls' tea party was lively with succession of trifling conversations.

"...See, since it's just my class that got poor average grade, we have to take a retest."

While getting a piece of assortment from her sister's cake, Celica, who seemed sulking as she made her lips pointing, told about what happened during today's class.

As Nine brushed her glossy hair which spilled over from her shoulders to her back, she looked at Celica with older sister-like eyes that were completely different from the eyes that were directed at Kazuma.

"How could it happen? You can get failing grade. Is your class all right?"

"Aah~, but I'm also poor at lightning magic. Since it can make a reaaally loud voice, I'll get frightened."

As Trinity talked with a strained smile, Celica nodded repeatedly like she understood about it. Then, her expression suddenly went cheerful.

"Ah, even so, I'm considerably skilled in levitation. I can't leap high, but I'm the best in class in flying long distance."

"The thought of you using levitation... somehow disturbs me. It's not just flying slowly like you think, you know."

In response to Celica, the cloudy looking Nine put the coffee-like substance to her mouth.

Celica giggled in girlish voice.

"Oh no, Onee-chan. Since there's the Mage's Guild's barrier, I can't get out from the island no matter how high I fly."

"Don't talk like that..."

"Ah, but."

Despite the appalled older sister, Celica suddenly changed the topic while putting her index finger to her chin.

"It's no good if levitation doesn't use broom. It's weird."

"But isn't it romantic to get on a broom to fly in the sky~?"

Joining both her hands together, Trinity spoke as if she was seeing a dream.

Kazuma just watched that scene while sometimes tasting his

cake and tea.

It seemed the center of the topic was always Celica.

Toward Celica who innocently spoke about her every day's events, Nine listened to her with warm affections while Trinity enjoying herself together with Nine.

The three of them must be close. He felt about that from when he saw Celica the first time, but he felt it again when he saw the scene happened in front of him.

With the females seemed to constantly have friendly conversation on the other seats, the sight of ordinary girls could be seen.

While thrusting the fork to his cake for some reason, Kazuma stole a glance at Trinity.

As for Trinity, she was engrossed in talking without taking a look at Kazuma's direction. If this was what she called monitoring, then she was very much a lacking schemer than what he expected.

(Just what is the meaning of this...)

He couldn't properly taste the flavor of the cake he brought to his mouth anymore.

(In case...)

The spectacle was too much of an every day's scene, but it gave birth to a tiny assumption in Kazuma's mind.

In case everything was a misunderstanding.

If Terumi's words which stated she was monitoring him were incorrect, then there would be no lie in Trinity's kindness, Nine's displeasure was only prejudice, and the discomfort he

got when Celica was around was a simple poor physical condition.

In case the Azure itself was just an illusion.

If that was the case, he must have been some kind of a fool.

Dreaming of non-existing illusion and questioning the hand which reaching out to him. He spent time as if thrusting himself away to obsession and suspicion.

If it was just like what he expected, then maybe the ordinary, peaceful, and harmonious life he was in wouldn't exist. That didn’t mean it was the days where he got tormented by lazy boredom; more like... admiring other people's affairs while living like ordinary people would.

If now... he forgot about the Azure, then just like he lost the whole seven years ago, the past he had to recover at all cost and the matter about the Cathedral would slip into obscurity.

The same as it had been until now, but also completely different.

He felt that he would set foot in that kind of academy life.

"...Kazuma-san? Kazuma-saaan?"

"Eh... Ah, yes?"

At Celica's voice, Kazuma raised his face while still gripping his fork tightly.

It seemed he had gone engrossed in thinking before he realized it. Kazuma scratched his cheek while smiling in embarrassment.

"Sorry. Since I haven't been too familiar with the place, I got dazed just now."

"Aha, I see. Hmm, looks like the shop is a little too cute for a man..."

Next to Celica who spoke like a child, a laugh that was like faint rustling of clothes resounded.

"Dazed, huh."

Nine interrupted with a tone of voice like she was looking for something. A bewitching but also stank of scheming of a voice; unsuitable with the atmosphere of the pleasant conversation which had been going until now.

"I wonder. Haven't you been doing some thinking?"

"Some thinking?"

Celica asked while bending her head slightly to one side to the unusual atmosphere. But Nine didn't answer her sister.

Resting her chin with gesture which looked elegant, she crossed her long legs. Her gaze was fixed and sharp; it stared at Kazuma as if she was concentrating in sewing.

"Nowadays, it seems the academy's Great Library has been your favorite place. Are you investigating for something?"

The brief comment that was disguised in ordinary conversation's tone of voice made tension ran on Kazuma's nape.

Nine knew. About the fact that for the whole two days, Kazuma skipped classes to investigate something.

How did she know about that? The simplest way of thinking would be that she had heard about it from Trinity who had especially greeted him back then.

Trinity informed Nine. Probably also about the matter Kazuma

was investigating... Perhaps also about when he said he wanted to look at the Mage’s Guild's highly classified information.

There was a noise of something shut tight within Kazuma's chest.

He shouldn't let his guard down. He mustn't display any chance. The girls weren't his allies. The suspicion which had awoken again warned Kazuma.

As if she saw through it, Nine's eyes became narrow.

"Have you found the information you desire?"

"...No. Unfortunately, I didn't find it."

Kazuma made an unambitious wry smile. A smile that seemed harmless and without any ill will as much as he could.

"You were looking for something which can't be searched in the academy's library?"

Nine insistently questioned him.

Perhaps, she must be waiting for Kazuma to make unpleasant face. Thinking she was going for that, Kazuma of course replied with gentle face.

"Since I don't usually make use places like the library, perhaps my method to investigate is bad. Granted, I've given up already."

"Oh?"

Raising her eyebrows, Nine seemed to still have something in her mind.

Before she could put it into words, Kazuma shifted the topic.

"Come to think of it, I know about it thanks to the investigation, but Nine-san and Celica-san are Professor Shuuichirou Ayatsuki's daughters, aren't you."

Shuuichirou Ayatsuki was a world-famous professor's name who had made many appearances in teaching alchemy. His primary research was fusing alchemy and science; and establishing soul to materials.

During the spare time of his investigation, Kazuma checked up about Nine, who strangely wary of him, from the Great Library's computer which had records of student information.

The outcome was he found out Celica's formal name was Celica A. Mercury. From there, he ended up finding she had blood relationship with Shuuichirou Ayatsuki.

The topic Kazuma brought out had more power than he thought. Instantly, Nine's expression turned to anger.

The area between her eyebrows became severely wrinkled in discomfort. In hatred, Nine informed him in low voice.

"That man isn't my parent. We're unrelated."

With that brief comment, he completely understood what Nine thought about her father.

He also understood Celica's thought as she turned every parts of her body to face the older sister, holding her father in contrasting thought.

"Don't say sad things like that, Onee-chan."

Rather than rebuking, it was better to say it as pouting.

However, Nine didn't back out. She snorted her nose to dismiss it, and then she sipped her coffee to swallow the

welling up unpleasant feelings.

"You too should cut it out. Forget about that man. He hasn't been there from the beginning."

"Of course he wasn't able to do that. He's our father, you know? Yes, he couldn't be together with us... but even so, he's our one and only father!"

If Celica clutched both her hands into fists not willing to get overcome, Nine also became irritated in different way.

"Quit calling that man as your father!"

"I won't. After all, he's my father! Onee-chan's, too. Why do you say bad things about Father!?"

"It's better for you not to know!"

"You always quickly say that! Not fair!"

With incredible power, the atmosphere became weird.

The store interior suddenly became noisy because both of their voices. Gazes gathered there taking a glance.

Unable to just watch it, Trinity leaned forward.

"Nine, Celica-san. We're in a store..."

To interrupt the chiding voice, Celica and Nine stood up at the same time.

"I said it since I'm thinking for Celica's sake!"

"That's just for your own convenience!"

A loud noise rang out. The furious sisters' hands simultaneously hit the table.

...Then, the force greatly shook the table. The vibration made the saucer of the tea before Trinity's eyes flipped up.

From there on, time extremely flowed slowly.

From the floating plate, a white cup went up in the air. The cup's body was turning around while slowly drawing a parabola...

A wet noise faintly echoed. Next, hard but light noise was played as the cup fell over the table.

Dead silence fell over the store interior which had been noisy until now.

Nine and Celica stood still with stiffened face.

Beyond the girls' gaze was Trinity who remained still while in half-rose position.

Platinum blonde of a noble princess from fairy tale. Hood of a witch. White skin of a fairy. That Trinity's round glasses and the chest part of her white uniform were basked and wet with the toppled over tea.

From the edge of the lenses, drips of royal milk tea fell to the table.

"...My glasses, have been stained."

Trinity slowly stood up. She wiped her glasses with a handkerchief she took out.

"Nine. Celica-san."

The voice she used to softly call them was gentle and kind. But for some reason, Kazuma's spine got frozen even though he was only listening.

"I have something to tell."

Kazuma didn't raise his face so he couldn't see what was inside the smiling Trinity's gaze as she spoke.

But as for Nine and Celica whom he stared at one after another, they became pale as if they saw something incredibly frightening. Without saying anything, they sat down after witnessing it.

Because it was frightening, he didn't have the will to check it.

It was an odd spectacle.

"...do so. Okay? Affection and consideration. Lacking of them is really sad for a human being. Not only the people you're together with every day, but also to nature and objects near you. Don't forget to act kind to them."

Celica and Nine were apologizing while listening to Trinity's speech which went on endlessly.

Celica aside, even for Nine to bow her head and apologize was really unbelievable for Kazuma who enrolled in the same class. That Konoe Mercury was apologizing. None of his classmates would believe it even if he told them.

Trinity's speech continued still.

At first it should have been a talk about glasses which had given a lot of help to people with bad eyesight in their ordinary days. However, the topic gradually shifted about past people struggling until they made transparent glass, then jumped to

the hardships of people who delivered materials in the island, and then the talk currently changed to being careful with objects.

The tone she used to talk was gentle all the way. Consequently, it seemed like listening to sermon in a church.

But Nine and Celica, still straightening their bodies so far, pulled their chins in exactly the same angle and bowed their heads down. They didn't attempt to object in any way.

The girls must have known. About what would happen if they disturbed Trinity's anger even more.

And the extent of that menace was thoroughly transmitted just from the sisters' frightened complexions.

Kazuma turned away from the girls, the spot that strained his mentality, and quickly looked at his objective.

The atmosphere made it impossible to cut the conversation. Or rather, it was the scariest thing to poorly interrupt and ended up getting involved.

Without further ado, Kazuma ignored the lecture which end was yet to be seen while quietly drinking his tea.

(Aah, I want to go home...)

He swallowed the spilled over mutter from his mouth he did involuntarily along with the tea.

And... it was that time. Kazuma's gaze was snatched away by the scenery outside of the window as he casually looked toward it.

Outside the store with roadside trees lined up, on the opposite side divided by road, a man wearing hood low over his eyes

was standing.

Despite that he looked out of place from the plain scenery, let alone people inside the store, even the people outside the window who sometimes crossed the road didn't bat an eye on him.

As if he could be seen only by Kazuma, Terumi stared here still.

Suddenly, Terumi moved. While starting to walk in calm manner, he jerked his chin to invite Kazuma.

Lured by that gesture, Kazuma quietly rose to his feet.

"Oh? Kazuma-san?"

Pausing her lecture, Trinity, who was in front of him, called him.

With just his reflex, Kazuma gave a smile and began to speak.

"Excuse me, I happened to notice an acquaintance. I'll return soon."

Not speaking more after it, Kazuma grabbed the bag which was on his feet and hurriedly rushed out of the store.

He took a detour from the shop and searched for that figure. He was already gone from the spot where he had been standing, but Kazuma saw the hem of his long coat just as it disappeared on a street corner.

A loud thump resounded.

Just as he witnessed Terumi's figure, he got a feeling that the blurred world turned clear. It was like the figure that should have been inside him came back.

If he didn't run after him, if he didn't catch up with him.

For the first time in top of his memory, Kazuma ran with full speed. Unbelievably uplifting feeling rose inside his chest.

Part 4

The beautiful sunset illuminated the townscape. At the same time, it engraved distinct shadows on the townscape.

Pushing his way through the two-tone coloring of bitter orange and black, Kazuma was dead set on running.

Out of the main street to deeper inside the island.

As Kazuma arrived in a part he had yet to set foot upon, he seemed confused like he was going to unrecognized other world because of the intense color that appeared sinister.

Ahead of his gaze was always a flickering retreating figure.

Fluttering hem of long jacket that was like a mantle. Fully worn hood that covered the hair and face. Slender shoulders with long, thin legs which were like silhouette.

Terumi had been walking. His steps were long, but not with the speed of running that couldn't be caught up with.

Despite that, even when Kazuma ran and panting countlessly, it was like the distance with him didn't get shortened.

It was like inside a dream. Even if he ran and struggled, he would never catch up with the person going in front of him. As if he was being left behind just like that in discolored world; such feeling of frustration was tearing off his chest.

Just what was this place? The scenery that went past through the edge of his vision didn't feel familiar to Kazuma at all.

There was nobody. The scattered buildings were small. There wasn't a single likelihood that people was living here.

Ishana by no means was a large island, but he never knew there was a place like this. The same was also true for this silent, deserted road.

Before long, the buildings disappeared with the townscape disrupted. Terumi pushed his way through bushes, threading it to go even further inside.

The other side of the bushes was surrounding the town like walls; it became like a thick forest. The trees were reinforcing magic. A forest dedicated to reinforce the barrier that was covering the island.

Proceeding through it, he went out of the shallow forest and finally arrived up to the edge of the island. There, Kazuma at last halted his feet.

The unfolded place there was a rugged rocky area. On the other side of it, a calm horizon could be seen. The frail roar of waves was heard; feeble ripples collided with rocks and split open fragilely.

In the past, the waves were even more great and powerful. But six years ago, because of the large scale nuclear attack intended to kill Black Beast, the world had changed; the wind declined and the waves grew weak.

Because his life was only going back and forth between the academy and dormitory, he didn't see the sea very often. But as he gazed at the heavily silent sea, he recalled that this island was isolated in the ocean.

Terumi placed his hands on a noticeably large rock and faced Kazuma, waiting for him.

"Yoo~, Kazuma-chan. Why are you wandering to this place? Got lost?"

He spoke as if comforting a stray dog.

Wheezing, Kazuma put his strained and disturbed breath in control while looking at Terumi bitterly.

"Wrong... I saw Terumi-san's figure... before..."

It was like he did it on purpose, added Kazuma in his mind. He followed that thought with that Terumi should have known about it from the start. The fact that he walked with speed which Kazuma could never catch up must also been on purpose. Though, he couldn't comprehend on how he could walk that fast.

With playful gesture, Terumi put up both of his hand at the height of his chest as if showing he surrendered.

"Hey, hey, hey. Don't give such rebellious eyes. I'm your reassuring ally, right~?"

"...I realized it. That's why I chased you, isn't it."

Even though his shoulders were heaving furiously, Kazuma straightened up his body.

Before he knew it, the vicinity gradually grew darker as the sun sinking on the west. The stars on the sky couldn't be seen. It was caused by the seithr that was enshrouding the outside of the barrier.

Seithr... an unknown substance spread on the world at the same time of the appearance of Black Beast six years ago. Even though he didn't want to get close to the border line with the outside world, he could actually sense the peaceless world.

Kazuma put back his gaze and consciousness from the sea toward Terumi.

"Rather than that, don't we have some kind of business? Why did you even go so far to this place?"

"Why, why, why. You're that stupid, huh."

"Terumi-san...!"

"Kukkuku, don't be that impatient. I'll show you some really nice stuff."

What an impatient guy, spoke Terumi with a tone as though he was doing a favor. It was like he got amazed of Kazuma's short temper.

The one who wanted to be amazed was me. Kazuma wanted to say that, but he let it pass. It was a waste of time to confront Terumi here.

"Look. It's this thing"

Quite sloppy compared to the time when he teased Kazuma. Terumi poked inside the shade of a rock with his tiptoe. What hit Terumi's tiptoe was the barrier covering Ishana.

That moment, Kazuma gulped.

Just near what Terumi's foot was showing, several sheets of paper stuck on the air. To be accurate, the papers were sticking on the barrier. The five sheets were in equal interval, as if drawing a regular pentagon.

The passage surrounded by the papers was so large that a single kid could pass through... Amazingly, a hole opened in the barrier like it was cut off cleanly there.

"Those beaten cat bastards seems to have opened it. It

seems that's because there's no getting inside the island directly as expected."

Sneering, Terumi raised the edges of his lips.

As for Kazuma, he currently began to mutter with trembling voice.

"Wha... What do you mean... by this."

Was it a good thing for such a thing to exist? The barrier covering Ishana didn't just prevent any physical interference from other countries; it also played a role in blocking the seithr that was drifting around the atmosphere.

The Black Beast which was threatening the world didn't appear but only in places that had seithr.

Ishana was rejecting seithr itself.

For this reason, it was the safest city in the world. Therefore, it wasn't allowed for the barrier to be torn.

"Oh no, if I don't quickly notify them...!"

If seithr reached the island, however secure the barrier was, it couldn't be said that this island was secure. Leaving over the matter that it would be a place that had seithr, there was a danger of Black Beast's arrival.

"Wait, wait, wait, Kazuma-chan. Look carefully."

While chuckling as he was amused, Terumi poked the barrier again. His tiptoe rubbed the stuck paper, but as if there existed different airspace, the paper was undisturbed.

Being told to, Kazuma looked closely at the produced hole in the barrier. But immediately he guessed that his eyes didn't see what they should have seen.

From the hollowed, unfolded hole of the barrier, the outside seithr had already gone in.

But no sooner as the seithr came into contact with Ishana's air, it faded away and vanished in a flash.

The seithr hadn't been able to even slightly pollute Ishana's air.

"The barrier... is neutralizing seithr?"

It was the first time for him to hear the Mage’s Guild's barrier had such a power.

Terumi laughed with a face like he knew all about it.

"W-R-O-N-G. It's because this island's air is unusually clean. But that ain't thanks to the barrier."

"Then, what...?"

"You think of something?"

Kazuma frowned. It was a nasty manner of listening.

"I don't know. Does Terumi-san also don't know?"

"Well~, who knows."

Terumi's suggestive manner of speaking made Kazuma slightly sighed. There were confusing matters when Kazuma just met him, but he had grown accustomed with this kind of attitude from Terumi in the next few days.

Terumi was that kind of a man.

"Still, nothing will happen to this island anytime soon. Relieved, young master?"

Terumi spoke of sarcastic words.

But for Kazuma, such a thing was still okay for now.

His gaze was fascinated by the gaping hole like it was being drawn in.

The barrier having a hole was a state of emergency that shouldn't happen. But for some reason, it sure enough appeared like an opened hole.

A small unusual phenomenon. It really made Kazuma's chest throbbed. He somehow got excited.

Toward Kazuma who watched intently at the hole, Terumi's crescent mouth drew near as he whispered from behind.

"But it doesn't mean it'll stay like this forever. If the balance of the island's atmosphere changes a little... then..."

"Seithr... will enter the island?"

Like he was being lured, Kazuma muttered. It seemed his thought and mouth moved on their own accords.

Instead of nodding, Terumi laughed in his throat.

"That's right. It's a disaster for this peaceful island to get harmed by seithr. It's a major incident, really serious affair, and a big problem, right?"

"Yes. It's a big problem..."

"Well then, Kazuma-chan. I got a question now."

He could hear the mischievous voice close to his ears.

Kazuma had a hunch he knew what Terumi was going to say before hearing it.

"You said this just now. It's 'oh no, if I don't quickly notify them...!'."

He imitated Kazuma's tone of voice on purpose.

But even that mockery didn't rub Kazuma's nerves the wrong way. Kazuma just stared at the barrier's hole like he got fascinated by it.

Terumi spoke.

"So? Who'd you notify?"

Right. He couldn't ignore the torn barrier. But since it wasn't possible for Kazuma to do something about it alone, he must inform someone about it.

To whom?

Restoring the barrier wasn't an easy task. At least, it wasn't possible with the level of an academy student.

While maintaining the barrier, this spot alone had to be fixed. It also had to be done quickly.

For someone to be able to do such advanced things, it would be limited to people who excelled in magical ability by far in Mage’s Guild.

For example... Ten Sages.

"Ten Sages..."

Kazuma's muttering leaked out as if spilling.

His lips moved like it was by reflex.

"In case seithr got into Ishana... The Ten Sages would eliminate it and try to restore the barrier."

Same with restoring the barrier, there was also nobody who could eliminate seithr.

Basically, it was impossible to get rid of seithr by human hands. If such a thing had been feasible, then it would have been possible to defeat Black Beast which was similar to a mass of seithr.

Suppose a magic that could neutralize and erase seithr existed, there would only be a handful of people who could do it as handling it was beyond ordinary man. Even if ignoring it, dealing with seithr required knowledge of advanced magic.

Currently, Kazuma didn't know the exact number of people in Ten Sages. But most of the students in the academy were aware that there were less people than the fixed number of ten people.

Driving away seithr, possibly by neutralizing it, and restoring the barrier had to be done simultaneously.

Even if the seithr was driven out first, if the hole was open, then new seithr would just get inside again. If restoring the barrier came first, since there would be no outlet for seithr, they would have to increase the neutralizing to the inner part of the island.

If such situation happened, even at the best of times, the small number of Ten Sages should all get gathered.

With everyone spending their time and energy on it, perhaps they would be shorthanded about other things.

Of course, Nine, too.

"Well, Whatcha gonna do, Kazuma-chan?"

Terumi's voice resounded inside his head.

Before he knew it, Kazuma got thirsty and swallowed saliva into his throat.

"——Ah."

He tried to say something.

But just before the words came.

Terumi suddenly pulled Kazuma's shoulder, forcing him to turn around.

"Wha..."

He was about to ask what Terumi was doing. However, Kazuma was at loss for words again.

Behind him, Nine and Trinity stood.

Part 5

The vicinity was still turning dark.

There was no street light in the rocky area of the island's outskirt. As the facial expressions of both parties gradually became undiscerned, without saying anything, Trinity created a faint light and let it float in the air.

As if they were mutually being cautious of the other party, silence flowed. What broke it was Nine's sharp voice.

"What are you doing? In this place... Alone."

"Eh...?"

Alone.

Because of Nine's words, Kazuma looked toward the surrounding in a panic.

(Terumi-san's gone...? Since when...)

However, Terumi's way of appearing in unexpected places and moments just saved Kazuma this time. If Nine was aware of Terumi's existence, it was awfully unthinkable for a favorable situation for Kazuma to happen.

"Looking for a way out? Looks like you're too slow."

Toward the obviously trembling Kazuma, Nine sneered at him with cold tone of voice.

Kazuma straightened his back in order to adjust his breathing. He told himself to calm down.

...As he did so, his head got surprisingly quick to regain serenity. It was creepy enough.

"Running away? Why would I run away?"

Kazuma's words made Nine's expression slightly moved. There was Trinity's light, but it nonetheless dark. There was no examining up to the details of the facial expression, but it didn’t appear to be a happy face.

"Besides, why did both of you even go here? I believe this isn't a place girls would visit on this hour."

Lifting her head toward Kazuma's question, Trinity took a large step forward.

"Because Kazuma-san wasn't coming back to the shop... we wondered where you might have gone to~."

"Even so, it seems I got accurately located. Did you use tracking magic?"

Just as he asked with a mocking smile mixed in, Trinity kept her mouth shut. Rather than the face of someone who got

correctly guessed, it was like the face of a girl who got hurt by thoughtless words.

Kazuma shrugged his shoulders. He thought that nothing would change even if he guessed it right. Perhaps Trinity still thought that Kazuma didn't notice about the monitoring. If so, what a pitiful girl.

"The one who has question is me. Answer. What have you been doing here?"

Different from Trinity, without any sign to draw back even a bit, Nine made her tone of voice even sharper.

As Kazuma made a troubled face, he answered while placing his hand on his head as if enduring a headache.

"But I believe I told you before, I happened to see an acquaintance, so I run after him. ...Although I said that, I suddenly recognized him as an acquaintance only. I don't know who he was."

"Could it be an acquaintance from before the memory loss?"

Sure enough, Trinity's surprised tone of voice was strong. Regardless of the scenery, her delightful facial expression was brimming.

Kazuma spontaneously dropped a smile.

Even now, Trinity perhaps still wished for Kazuma's memory to return. If that was the case, it was painful for every single word from him betraying her kindness.

"Yes, I think so. When I caught sight of him, I was unable to contain myself... I'm sorry."

And yet numerous false words came out of his mouth.

But Nine's sharp presence didn't even slightly slacken as expected. Instead it became even more coercive; those glints in her eyes shone in the dead of night.

"If so, I wonder if that's the doing of your before-memory-loss friend?"

"And that is?"

Kazuma carefully asked.

Nine walked gallantly with long steps and passed through Kazuma's side. She walked skillfully with her thin, tall heels on the unstable rocky area before stopping at greeneries.

"This."

A voice that was like looking down on lowly people.

He knew exactly what Nine had seen to make her said that.

With ordinary student's behavior, Kazuma took a quick look at the beach.

"Aah, that one. I wonder what on earth it is. It appears like papers floating in the air to me... Is it some kind of a good luck charm?"

As he scratched his head while answering with pretense like he completely didn't know about it, Nine glared over her shoulder. The beautiful expression which carried nothing but grim made his guts grew cold.

"Don't tell me you'll say something like not knowing about it."

"No... B-But I don't know."

Flinching, Kazuma took a step backward.

As if Nine's eyes were assessing every single of his gesture for their credibility, she carefully glared at Kazuma's whole body. Dyed in shadow, the long eyelashes on Nine's eyes winked for several times.

Trinity didn't say anything. Accompanied by the small light, she appeared to wrack her brains while watching attentively to Nine and Kazuma's banter.

Waves split open on Kazuma and Nine's feet. The modest sound of water disturbed the silence.

As Nine closed her eyelids once, she turned her face away from Kazuma.

"...Fine. Then I'll leave it as it is."

The high-pitched noise of heels hitting the rocky area resounded.

While letting loose a feminine fragrance, Nine went away. As she did so, Kazuma quietly slackened his mouth.

Was that an indication that she had guessed it? Or did it go unnoticed under the cover of night? After Nine stopped once more a little in front of Trinity, she looked over her shoulder to see Kazuma with a testing way of speaking.

"It seems there was a huge idiot making a hole in Mage’s Guild's barrier. I have to hurry getting in touch with Ten Sages and prepare for restoration arrangement. That's why..."

Nine smiled provocatively.

"If you discover something else while running, do you think you could let me know?"

The glamorous hair fluttered as if dancing. After she urged

Trinity who was still concerned about Kazuma, Nine left from that place at a quick pace along with her close friend.

With the noise of grass being treaded vanished, Trinity's light became completely invisible.

The sky got tainted in the color of night completely. Suddenly the air grew cold; it was a bit unpleasantly cold to stand in one place in a daze.

Still having waves splashed on his feet, Kazuma expressionlessly looked at the papers which were on the shade of the rocky area.

The hole in the barrier. There was still no indication of seithr coming in from there.

That hole had a role. Connecting the exterior of the island with the inside; a role of giving a huge task for Ten Sages so that they had to get all their members.

(Even if this hole got closed, there is a mean to open it, so it'd be good to find it. However...)

Nine of the Ten Sages. She alone seemed to continue being cautious of Kazuma even just now.

It was preferred for this hole to draw in seithr to an extent so that Nine forgot about the torn barrier; and from hereafter, Nine would absolutely pay no attention about Kazuma.

(Alternatively... something that disappears during the situation which she has to pay attention to.)

At any rate, she was a hindrance.

Pondering while standing still on the rocky area, Kazuma gnawed the finger which stuck to his mouth; he gnawed the

tooth especially strong. The teeth scrubbed the joints.

A method to keep Nine at a distance.

"...Isn't it easy?"

Kazuma chuckled and hurriedly left behind the rocky area.

Chapter 5: Night of Black Betrayal

Part 1

And then, night came.

A night that was creepy for some reason. The moon which was waning in the dark sky took control, while there was scarce wind.

A terribly chaotic night which the deep black of night sky and sea were mixed together in the distant horizon.

Kazuma stood alone on rocky area which only relied on the moonlight.

About two hours ago, it was the place he barely arrived at after being guided by Terumi and also the place where he encountered Nine and Trinity to make the matter worse.

The night of the rocky area would be like shadow lump if it hadn't been touched; on the opposite side, the waves which played frail noises was like stagnant darkness. If there was a place referred as other world, then this location seemed to be the boundary line with the present world.

He was hallucinating on whether the world had already gone or not. As time was eternal, the night and silence had yet

come to an end.

Just about everything seemed to have already ended...

On the opposite side of the bushes, small lights flickered.

Perceiving it with the proximity of his vision, Kazuma hid himself in the shade of a nearby rock.

(It's still early for the end. Rather... it's starting from now on.)

If he were to be asked what it was, it would be everything.

Yes, getting back everything. Like what Terumi said in the beginning.

As if wavering silhouette, what appeared by shoving and separating bushes from between the trees was the person Kazuma waited for.

It was like the person didn't have any cautious behavior. Even more, it was extremely doubtful for her to be cautious to anybody.

After Kazuma smoothly stepped forward under the moonlight, he greeted with gentle smile.

"Did you arrive without telling anyone? ...Celica A. Mercury-san."

Black and white uniform of the academy; long ponytail that jumped each time she walked. The color of the pupils, which were illuminated by the burning light of magic on her fingertips, was easily recognized in this dark place.

Celica turned the pointed light here. Once she realized the other party was Kazuma, she made her relieved face really cheerful.

"It's okay. Since Onee-chan joined a meeting in a sudden, there's no one in home."

With light manner of walking, Celica rushed over just close to Kazuma.

That moment, Kazuma tasted the massive weight of a sensation from the surrounding atmosphere.

Powerfully tightening his molars, he desperately held his breath for several seconds. He grew pale in an instant. The dragged out consciousness receded; dizziness and nausea made him crumbled down from the knees.

Why did he get this sick when he was together with Celica? He didn't know the reason, but he couldn't pass out or run back home here.

"That's good. After all, I have something I must tell just to Celica-san alone."

While encouraging himself up in his mind, Kazuma gave a smile as if he was relieved.

Didn't suspect anything, Celica stared at Kazuma with serious look.

"But what kind of talk? ...You said that it's about Father."

After he parted with Nine and Trinity, Kazuma hastily returned until he got to the main street and searched for Celica's home. Immediately after the banter, Nine should be heading to Mage’s Guild in order to report to Ten Sages. It was a race for him to find it before Nine returned.

When he bumped with Celica who was on her way home after shopping at the vicinity of the previous café, it was the first time for him to thank God for his good fortune. Since he didn't

happen to have fragments of faith, he had to be pleased with only a vague image of God.

I have something to talk about Professor Shuuichirou Ayatsuki.

Saying only that and then told her he would only talk it in this place, Kazuma immediately left that spot... and arrived now. He didn't came and bring Celica along just like that so that they wouldn't be seen by Nine by any chance.

With the setting of dark rocky area and sea, Kazuma slightly nodded with a very serious appearance.

"Celica A. Mercury-san. As I know you and Nine-san are Shuuichirou Ayatsuki's daughters, I have checked up a little regarding your father. Since six years ago on that day... he's missing, isn't he?"

Six years ago on that day, a world threatening demon, the Black Beast, appeared in Japan. A day when nuclear attack was done to put it into oblivion.

Just before the nuclear attack, all the people who had been living in the target, Japan, were evacuated outside the country. But those departures weren't flawless; several people couldn't escape and were left inside the country.

Shuuichirou Ayatsuki was one of them. The moment the island country turned into scorched earth, he was in Japan.

Hearing her father's name, Celica's pupils wavered in loneliness.

"...You were told he's missing, weren't you."

The spilled muttering was like she felt relief and had abandoned hope; a delicate sound.

"And yet Onee-chan and people around me said my father has died. There was a small funeral, you know?"

"...How do you feel about it?"

"Eh?"

Toward the slipped words from Kazuma which was in gentle tone, Celica shifted her attention to them as if bewildered.

Although she had disturbed complexion, her eyes were always direct. The unclouded gaze once more gave mysterious chill to Kazuma.

Enduring it, Kazuma stared Celica back.

"A few days ago, you know there's news of a survivor found in Japan. That time, you watched the news with a serious looking face. ...Are you also thinking about it? About Shuuichirou Ayatsuki, your father, who died as he got involved in the nuclear attack six years ago..."

"That's..."

Unusually, Celica hesitated and was at loss for words.

Her father being alive, the matter, which she always used to say that she couldn't put into words now, had no basis in it. That was why it was only Celica's simplistic wish.

How much of a miracle the discovery of survivor's news was, even Celica understood about it. Also on how similar miracle couldn't happen so many times.

There might only be one sheet of the fortune card that the survivor had luckily drawn.

As if giving it a thought, Kazuma folded his arms in slow movement and turned his head to the sea. As if coiling to one, the dark night and sea merged; its border couldn't be exactly seen.

He focused his gaze beyond the really deep darkness. He wasn't even sure which direction from here where the island country called Japan existed, with a feeling like he was gazing at it.

"To tell you the truth, since then, I also had personal interest at the news and investigated it."

"Kazuma-san did?"

"Yes. The rescued man from the other day seems to work as researcher in a research institute, similar to Professor Ayatsuki. But six years ago, he got engrossed in his study and completely forgot about the fixed date for the evacuation. Luckily, since a few days ago before the nuclear attack, he stayed at a research facility that was in deep underground. It might be thanks to it that he got spared."

Cutting off his words, still turning his body toward the sea, Kazuma returned his gaze to Celica in order to look at her

reaction.

Celica's large eyes got even more widely opened. Appeared to be standing motionless, she tried to stand still while attentively listening to Kazuma's words.

The story Kazuma spoke off was information yet to be released to public. Celica also probably just heard it for the first time.

It was the good point of Mage's Guild. If they were motivated, they would investigate about it. Under the cover of dark night, Kazuma secretly chuckled.

"Professor Ayatsuki is a world-famous researcher. If he's conducting research, it would be done in an appropriately large facility. I didn't investigate as far as where the professor worked, but there has to be an underground facility there."

Undoubtedly, the research institute where the male survivor employed couldn't be said that it was a large scale one. Yet the underground facility of that research institute had the strength to withstand nuclear attack.

It was unthinkable for the workplace of the world-famous researcher Shuuichirou Ayatsuki for not arranging that much security.

"Besides..." whispered Kazuma with low voice while slowly turning to Celica.

"The man is a plain survivor. ...However, it seems he's saying unusual statement."

"What's unusual about it?"

The lured Celica lowered her voice.

The night wind flickered the treetops that were like silhouettes.

It wasn't clear which the roar of waves and which the noise of forest was. Waiting for the moderate noises to disappear, Kazuma calmly answered to tell the story.

"He said, 'It's unbelievable for six years to pass since then. One year... or at most, two years that I believe has passed.'"

"Six years... to one year? No matter what, that's..."

"Certainly it feels hard to believe. But the unusual thing starts now. ...The man didn't leave the research institute. He passed time eating the stored emergency food. However, even if it was consumed by only one person, the amount wasn't enough to be eaten for six years at all. Moreover, with his body weight being in average, he's in no situation of being especially skinny."

"Eh, eh? Wait, what do you mean?"

The light on her fingertip wandered about as the confused Celica put her hand on her head.

Calmly, like he was talking to children, Kazuma tried to rephrase it in slow tone.

"You see, the man had been living in the ruin's underground for six years. Yet the traces of living which can be seen are estimated for just two years at most. ...Like that."

It wasn't only that. Six years were long. It would corrupt and weaken the body. If the hair were cut, the sheared hair would remain. The clothes would deteriorate. The footwear would wear down. Even with such things, the man had been verified that he had lived in the underground for two years at most.

"Two years..."

Celica muttered with blurred voice. The expression like she wanted to say that it was unbelievable.

As if giving it a thought, Kazuma drew his chin with meek expression.

"It's a truly unimaginable phenomenon. But as for the traces of living for six and two years, It doesn't seem likely for experts to mistake it even if they only giving it a sight. Besides... isn't there already an unimaginable monster existing in our world?"

"...The Black Beast."

Sluggishly speaking that name, Celica's expression got even stiffer.

On the other side of the barrier's layer that was wrapping the island, the world was constantly frightened of Black Beast's fangs. It was like a dream. But it was certainly an unmistakable reality that burdened the world.

Kazuma slipped a single cynical sigh.

"Japan is closely related to that monster. For a place where unexplainable phenomenon has occurred several times, it's nothing like a mystery now."

The span of six years becoming two; it was also possible for it to be reduced to even shorter length. It wasn't a miracle no matter what happened. Japan was that kind of a place.

"...Perhaps so."

To suppress the welling up anxiety in her chest, Celica embraced her chest with both hands. In that ridiculous, irrational land, her father was left behind alone.

To cheer up Celica, Kazuma put his hand on Celica's

shoulder.

The moment it touched, Discomfort and rejection were rushing for him as if extremely repulsive thing got crushed with all his strength. Beneath the calm expression, Kazuma desperately calmed down the unnaturally stiffening hand.

"Celica-san. Please think about it. Surviving for six years with surviving for two years under the harsh environment; do you think there's a huge difference in the survival rate?"

Kazuma's pale colored lips expressed a smile to encourage her.

"In case in the same way the survivor from the other day did, Professor Ayatsuki was in a sturdy underground facility. In the same way blessed with preserved food. In the same way was within the miraculously slow time. Then..."

Slightly gasped, Celica looked up intensely at Kazuma. Even if her large pupils seemed to be slightly wet, she looked at him.

"Maybe... Father is also..."

While surrounded by weakened thought, Celica spoke with trembling voice.

"Father is also... possibly, alive...?"

It might be a shortsighted wish. It might be a foolish delusion.

But the pieces of information Kazuma showed side by side in front of Celica supported her prayer-like thought toward her father.

When Kazuma pulled his lips making a deep smile, Celica's face bloomed like a large flower.

But before that smiling face stopped blooming, Kazuma

unexpectedly retracted his smile. The hand that had been placed on the girl's shoulder was weakly released like it was let fall.

"But... Too bad, isn't it."

As he slightly sighed, hinting of disappointment, Kazuma turned his gaze to his feet to turn his face away from Celica.

Celica peeked at him to follow it.

"What's wrong?"

"...I hate to say it... but I heard it seems the UN's army that's currently dispatched in Japan is aiming to establish an on-site investigation. Just because a single survivor was found, there's no particular plan to search for survivor..."

"W-Why!? There might be another people who are alive!"

The fully blooming smiling face of Celica was frozen midway in shock.

Toward the demanding Celica who made both her hands to fists, as if calming her, but also with a voice that didn't conceal discouragement, Kazuma answered.

"It's unknown how many people were missing in the first place. Even at the best of times, they can't separate the few personnel they have. Everyone has been thinking that this time was just a fortunate chance, so it's still hopeless for the survival of the people who was left in Japan six years ago."

Because of the large scale nuclear attack, the ground surface was more than being ruined. Furthermore, six years' worth of months and years had flown. It was meaningless to delay the original investigation activity because of being manipulated by the miracle of survivor. It was because the likeliness of

discovering a new survivor was eternally close to zero.

Dropping his shoulders, Kazuma shook his head to grieve.

"Assuming Professor Ayatsuki's alive... Whether if he's being located by the army or not, it'd be better to have someone unrelated with the army to head there searching for the professor."

"Yeah... But anyone who isn't a soldier isn't allowed to land in Japan."

Celica's dejection wasn't equal to Kazuma's. Moreover, Kazuma's dejection was just the manner. At his mind, he wholeheartedly just wanted to quickly move away from Celica's face.

"Oh, you didn't know? Just the other day, voyage for civilian to head to Japan had been granted. From the port city nearest to Japan, a number of ferries should be leaving on the first day of the month."

"Is that... true!? People can go to Japan without being a soldier!? E-Even me!?"

Raising her surprised voice, Celica grasped Kazuma's hands with both of her hands to seize it.

"Hii...!"

Because it was too sudden, a voice that was like a scream escaped from Kazuma's mouth right away.

However, as her feelings didn't get stopped from even such a thing, Celica drew even closer to Kazuma.

"Anyone's fine? Without any formalities or inspections?"

"Y-Yes... I heard that there's only the voyage fee and a brief

examination to get across."

"Then, then... Even I can go to Japan, right!?"

"Yes, of course. Rather from now on, I wonder if it isn't too much to think that Celica-san will have to visit place to place in Japan. Like everyone who have become separated from their family six years ago."

While enduring it as he still couldn't shake off the hands which got gripped, Kazuma desperately spoke.

Strength filled with enthusiasm was added to Celica's hands.

Kazuma's hands were cold. Celica's hands were warm; the girl's throbbing heartbeat seemed audible.

"I... want to save Father. No, I'll go!"

Where might the hesitation from when she was asked if she thought her father was alive go to? As if blowing away all the doubt she had until now, Celica looked up straight to Kazuma.

Even if the night was dark, Celica's deep brown eyes could be seen clearly.

While getting a chill that could make him fainted from the pure and innocent color, Kazuma also squeezed back Celica's hands with frowning expression.

"By go... you mean to Japan? You mustn't. It's too dangerous."

"But, isn't there possibly no other people who think to try saving Father? Everyone believes Father is dead. Then people who need help won't get rescued!"

It looked like there was already no single of doubt in her.

Kazuma let out a troubled groan for a while. But as if yielding to Celica's strong determination in her gaze, Kazuma finally smiled wryly.

"Looks like it's useless to stop you."

"Aha. Onee-chan also told me exactly that."

Vigorously, the long ponytail on Celica's back jumped.

"That's right. Onee-chan hasn't been told of this conversation. After that, we'd board a ship as soon as possible..."

"Aah, about telling Nine-san... I think it's better to pass on it."

Toward the cheerfully smiling Celica who were bright enough to illuminate even the dark night, Kazuma spoke while slipping a bit of gloom.

Still joining hands together, Celica bent her head slightly in a puzzle.

"Why?"

"Nine-san will surely object to your decision. She's a Ten Sage. She can make the necessary preparation to not issuing the permission to leave the island."

"Onee-chan doing that sort of thing..."

Is unthinkable, a statement which however optimistic the good-natured Celica was, even she couldn't say. As her lips distorted to a pouting, her eyebrows were lowered as if troubled.

"But... there's no way I can go while keeping it quiet. Besides, if I apply to get out of the island, it'll get circulated to Onee-chan anyway. In the end, wherever I go, I think I won't be able to proceed if I don't tell her."

There was a formal procedure to leave Ishana. If a relative tried to go out, confirming about it to Nine as she was the guardian was what to be expected.

Objection was the consequence. Toward the sighing Celica who was thinking about that, Kazuma smiled to cheer her and softly whispered to her ear.

"Celica-san. If I say there's a way to get out of the island without being known to your sister... what would you do?"

Instantly, the night of the rocky area fell silent like it was concealing its breath. Gentle wind passed through as if it tried to move something to reveal it.

Celica's long hair swayed.

"...You can get me out?"

It was Celica's true feeling which leaked out unintentionally.

Kazuma nodded to persuade her.

"Do you want to know the details?"

As for Celica's reply, it was clear from the beginning.

——There's a secret exit. From there, you can leave Ishana's barrier.

However, it'll close if you don't hurry. It's no good if you don't pass through it as soon as possible tonight.

Once you're outside of the barrier, please go along the island's outer wall to the harbor.

You're good in levitation, right?

The procedure to go out is only necessary when you're getting out of the barrier.

A ship will arrive once morning comes.

What to do after that... is up to you.

Part 2

Since the following day was a holiday, Kazuma woke up later than the usual.

It might be because last night he had returned while having a physical condition that felt extremely tiresome even now; a sluggish feel remained like he still hadn't had enough sleep. He stretched his body while still only half awake and then opened the window's curtain.

From there, Kazuma understood the change on the situation.

The scene he was seeing was faintly, slightly in putrid haze.

It was seithr.

The seithr, which had lost to Ishana's pure air and been unable to enter through the existing entrance until yesterday, somehow spread out doing corrosion now.

Last night, a young girl crossed over Ishana's barrier and went outside. At that time, something had taken a place and might have created an opportunity to draw in the outside seithr.

Kazuma didn't know the details of the cause, but this was

undoubtedly a good chance.

Nine and the other Ten Sages didn't close the hole on last night. Furthermore, while it wasn't clear when it had become like that, the influx of seithr abruptly began to enter.

He snapped out at once.

After he threw off his sleep-wear, Kazuma carefully changed to plain clothes and wore the uniform that was still placed outside. He was about to jump out of the room after properly pinning down his hair only.

Then, when Kazuma's hand was about to grab the doorknob, the door was knocked violently.

Because of the too much of a surprise, he almost raised his voice. Taking a deep breath and then holding it, Kazuma responded with calm tone of voice.

"Who is it?"

What returned from the other side of the door was unexpected, but also had an expected meaning of a voice.

"OPEN THE DOOR QUICKLY! OR ELSE, I'LL BLOW THE WHOLE ROOM!"

It was Nine. He didn't see her facial expression, but he was aware her mind was in anger by just from the voice.

Kazuma opened the door in a hurry.

"P-Please spare me of it. It's the academy's property...!"

The high heel's tiptoe split the small opened gap; and the door got forcefully opened just like that.

Behind Nine who was impolitely stepping in the room, the

baffled Trinity was there.

After Nine rudely cornered Kazuma up until the desk close to the wall, she grabbed Kazuma's collar with both hands and strangled him.

"...Tell me where Celica is."

"Uh, guh... Wh-What is it... s- suddenly..."

There was no mercy in Nine's hands.

With his throat got pressured by the bloodthirsty strength, Kazuma's breathing became disabled in the blink of time. He tried to quickly tear off Nine's hands, but there was already no more strength entering his fingertips.

"Guh... Cough... Le-Let go..."

"Tell me Celica's whereabouts. If you obediently confess, I'll let you live."

Nine's eyes glared up at Kazuma with terrifying sharpness. When their eyes met, that instant the instinctive panic turned to chill, making Kazuma's spine shivered.

"Nine! Please stop already...!"

Trinity rushed over in a panic. Rather than calming her, it was more like she was begging.

"Kazuma-san is about to die... Besides, he can't even talk like that."

After Nine clattered her teeth at her close friend's words, she released Kazuma so he hit the floor.

Since the staggering feet couldn't support his body, Kazuma fall on his backside above a modest carpet. As the flowing

oxygen went in at once, his throat coughed to the extent he got a spasm.

From above his head, Nine's clicking tongue was audible as if it was spat out.

"I've released you. Now answer."

"You told me to answer... but please let me know the situation

first. Is there something wrong with Celica-san?"

Still sitting on his rear end, Kazuma rubbed his throat while looking up at Nine. Because of the suffocation, the insides of his ears were ringing.

With a look like her anger was still unsettled, Nine folded her arms under the voluptuous chest, disheveled her hair.

Substituting for her as she didn't say anything, Trinity placed her knees near Kazuma and informed him.

"The truth is, it happened suddenly in this morning. Celica-san's whereabouts has become unknown..."

"Then... do you mean she's missing? Why?"

"WE CAME TO YOUR PLACE SINCE IT ISN'T KNOWN!"

Nine's angry voice soared. Her voice and also presence were harsh in her utmost irritation.

Kazuma backed out with stiffened face and asked with incomprehensible tone of voice.

"Th-That's why, for what reason do you ask me? I shouldn't know anything, right?"

"IF YOU DON'T KNOW, NO ONE ELSE DOES!"

Nine yelled to quickly dismiss Kazuma's opinion.

But immediately Trinity who was watching over in suspense noticed it. After Nine roughly brushed away her hair, she took out a piece of paper and threw it, aiming at Kazuma's face.

"Ouch."

What hit his cheek was a light yellow colored writing paper

folded in four. Kazuma picked up the paper which had helplessly fallen before unfolding it.

The characters were clear; but it was composed of writing errors left behind in some places as if written in a hurry.

"To Onee-chan. Sorry, I'm going to Japan to search for Father. I'm all right, so don't worry about it. I'll definitely return, so let's have another tea with you, Trinity-san, and Kazuma-san! Celica"

Not describing even the circumstances and one-sidedly being reckless in her own convenience; it was indeed a Celica-like letter.

After Kazuma finished reading the letter's contents, Nine began to talk while putting oppressive threat.

"Yesterday, you brought up the matter about her father. But until now, whenever someone brought it up, Celica never rushed out from here like now. Sometime later, you influenced Celica of something irresponsible, didn't you!? If you didn't, THEN WHY IS THIS HAPPENING!?"

The words which started in low tone finally ignited by rage; Nine violently kicked the chair beside Kazuma. The modest chair gave a simple cry and fell over the floor.

"I sympathize with your feeling, but please don't break the furnitu..."

Even while flinching from the rough sound, Kazuma talked back. Responding to it, Nine's high heels went silent. With the sharp heel, she pinned on Kazuma's shoulder which weaved its way and stopped at the desk behind.

"...I'm asking you once more. Answer it honestly. I'll kill you if you say lies."

"Y-Yes."

"Where did Celica go? What have you been telling that girl?"

Konoe Mercury, the prodigy who was blessed with exceptional talent. The ninth Ten Sages. With unusual force, the eyes glared at Kazuma as if shooting through him with their glints.

Were those eyes also shooting through the truth which Kazuma kept to himself?

As if overpowered, Kazuma raised his eyes at Nine and squeezed out the answer.

"I... I don't know. Nothing."

Nine's face distorted in terrible displeasure. Like a whip, her arms were stretched, seizing Kazuma's collar for the second time.

Kazuma raised a miserable voice and moved his body a little.

Trinity bent herself forward to stop Nine.

Then, it was that moment. From the window, a beam of light got in between. It was from the direction of the academy.

The light that was as thick as a person's index finger hit the room's floor without damaging the windowpane. With the smoothness of signing a document, it drew a message.

——Ten Sages are to assemble at once.

After it briefly wrote, the light which had sustained for five seconds disappeared.

It was a conveying magic. The person to receive the request from the Mage’s Guild's officials had to be Ten Sages.

It was obviously addressed to Nine.

"At such a time..."

Groaned in irritation, Nine let go of Kazuma again.

"It seems you've escaped death. I'll ask the continuation again next time."

Forcefully holding down her anger, Nine turned around, together with her hair and mantle. Like that, she dashed out of the room without giving a glance at Kazuma.

In the quiet and simple hallway of the boy's dormitory, loud footsteps from high heels reverberated loudly.

While listening to the footsteps which went distant, Trinity lowered the ends of her eyebrows even lower than usual; and while still sitting, she reached out her hand to Kazuma. Then, she made a prompt.

"Sorry. Please... don't get offended~."

Gripping the hand of Kazuma who got up, Trinity spoke as if wishing. Her gentle eyes were awfully sad as they were wet; it looked like she would begin to cry anytime soon.

"For Nine, Celica-san is her only precious family. Her mother died a very long time ago, while her father left home ten years ago. It seems Nine has lived while always, always protecting Celica-san."

"That's why she's that overprotective, I see."

Looking toward the direction of the door that was still left open, Kazuma muttered in bitter sympathy.

Trinity slightly nodded. She was a much shorter girl when compared to Kazuma, but she was even smaller than ever

now.

"Despite her appearance, Nine's a very sensitive girl. When Celica-san's, her irreplaceable sister's figure is missing, I know that she can't help but feel anxiety and worried. That's why..."

Trinity raised her eyes to Kazuma with calm tone of voice. The wise green eyes were wishing, seemingly begging.

"About Celica-san. If you know something, please tell it~. It's all right to speak it to me. Even if it's only a bit of information, I think it'll calm Nine down."

"...Umm. My apologies."

To separate it, Kazuma pulled his hand from Trinity's hand.

"I truly don't know where Celica-san might have gone to. I'm worried about Celica-san nonetheless."

He only said sorry as he looked downward. The dropped gaze was even lower than at Trinity who was looking up.

For a little while, Trinity looked shocked and hesitated to spoke, but she eventually raised her face and showed a smile through her tears.

"That's so, isn't it. I've been very rude... being somewhat doubting. If you know about something, then..."

"Of course. Even if it's minor, I'll tell you if I know something."

It was a promise he couldn't help but did to encourage her, but Trinity's eyes began to open at Kazuma's words. Holding down her chest with the peeking fingers from her loose sleeves, she deeply bowed her head.

"Thank you, Kazuma-san~. Then, I'll also excuse myself. I'm

worried to leave Nine alone as she is now."

"Be careful."

Kazuma replied with a slight nod.

When Trinity left to the hallway, in front of the door she once again bowed her head, just a slight for this time. The hem of her long robe waved while she began to jog to chase after Nine.

Until the retreating figure that was like a small person coming out of fairy-tale disappeared in the staircase, until the still vanishing footsteps completely disappeared, Kazuma stood in front of the room, continued to see her off.

The on holiday's hallway of the dormitory was silent.

After Kazuma returned to the room, he went toward near the window. Placing his back on the wall, he made sure to hide himself and peeked outside from the lace curtain's crevice.

After a short while, he saw a small person-like retreating figure that had her platinum blonde, which could be clearly seen even from a distance, spilled from the hood while coming out of the dormitory. For a moment, she looked over her shoulder as if something was bothering her; but without looking up at the room's window, she left just like that.

That figure also completely disappeared from Kazuma's sight.

Leaning his body near the window, Kazuma took a thin, deep breath.

"...Khu..."

Just as the emotion welling up, the slender shoulders were trembling as if shaking. Couldn't endure it, Kazuma covered

his face with his palm.

Between the spread thin fingers, the ends of his lips gradually raised up.

"Khu, kuku... Fu, hahahahahahahaha."

It was amusing. He couldn't suppress the laugh at all.

With his stomach seemed convulsed, it made his sides painful. His back rubbed against the wall until he sat on the floor. Even so, he kept on laughing even more.

"Khukkukukuku, hahahaha, fuhaha, ha... Oh no, my stomach hurts... Khuku, what's with those faces? The faces both of them made... Hi, hahaha. Even if they search anywhere on this island, that girl isn't here anymore."

The important younger sister, the precious friend's younger sister; she must have got on a ship which departed early this morning and was crossing over the ocean about now. It was already too late to be in panic as it was approaching noon now.

What even more amusing was that Nine, who had threatened to kill Kazuma if he told lies, didn't kill him after all; and following it, even Trinity left Kazuma behind and took off.

In the end, Nine gave up on determining if Kazuma's words were lies.

In the end, Trinity gave up on doubting Kazuma.

Naïve, naïve, naïve. Terumi spoke some time ago.

Saying things like after being imprisoned in such disgusting island, Kazuma didn't have to get contaminated by those dumb pretty magicians.

Good grief. It was sentimental enough to get warm of getting suffocated. It was because he secluded himself in the island that Terumi said as disgusting and only sticking to desk that he couldn't make clear judgment.

So sweet it puked one's guts out.

"Aah... To laugh and letting out such voice."

As he hit his head against the wall, making a dull sound, Kazuma again and again laughed while facing the ceiling.

He used to think that he couldn't fathom the joyful laughter of someone in the academy when he heard it. But might it also be this refreshing?

His chest was refreshed; it was a feeling like he was looking up at the unseen lovely weather.

Nothing would hinder him anymore.

Nothing would refuse him anymore.

Nothing would shun him anymore.

The road was all set.

"I..."

On the ceiling he looked up at, there was an old stain. From the time he was an applicant, he had grown accustomed to it for the whole time. An unchanging stain.

You've been in such a boring place, right? You've been in such a narrow and suffocating place, right?

Everything had already ended.

As if he was turning the motion to sit in reverse, Kazuma

rubbed his back against the wall while standing up.

On the outside of the window was the invigorating Ishana which was turning impure, dyed in seithr.

It was amusing. It was extremely delightful and enjoyable he was about to laugh uncontrollably again.

"I'm going to obtain it..."

He tore his shadow from the wall as he began to walk.

The destination had been decided.

He was going to obtain it.

The *Azure*.

Part 3

Mage’s Guild——Cathedral.

A place where Mage’s Guild's ceremonies were held, including Ten Sage's canonization. It was also a facility that continued to witness the long history of Mage’s Guild in this land. For those reasons, the Cathedral was also said as a symbol indicating Mage’s Guild itself.

Positioned on a section of the academy's courtyard, its appearance was a small building made of white stone. But in reality, the construction got its length increased enough to go underground.

In the circular council room located in the Cathedral's underground, all the members of Ten Sages on duty had been assembled in emergency.

Although said as all the members, the number of people was

less than ten.

Uniformly wearing dignified robe and large triangular hat, they, accompanied by quiet tension, were surrounding an emerging round table with strange pattern.

Of course, the figure of Nine who had been summoned with conveying magic just a while ago was also among them.

"Everyone must have noticed already... Seithr is flowing into Ishana."

The emergency meeting began with the dignified, heavy tone of voice from a man who acted as the leader.

Encircled by magic lights which were floating midair, the Ten Sages let their respiration strained.

Anybody was aware of the existence of seithr which was fouling Ishana's air. But the question was how seithr went in.

The male leader continued.

"You must have remembered there was a report from Nine that a tear was forming in a part of the barrier. It appears the seithr is coming in from that tear."

At those words, several Ten Sages murmured in low tone.

Last night, the Ten Sages had also been gathering like now. There, a report from Nine was established regarding a tear on the barrier. But exactly last night, as there had been no seithr getting in or any indication of it, it was only decided to postpone the restoration intended to investigate the cause.

The female Ten Sage sitting across from Nine knocked away her chair trying to stand up.

"What's the cause of the influx? In yesterday's late night

report, was there not even a bit about seithr flowing from the tear...!?"

"Ishana's atmosphere should have been clean enough to force back seithr. It's unthinkable for it to have changed in one night!"

The Ten Sages unanimously shouted the baffling matters.

While hearing it, Nine was absolutely silent as she looked downward.

Nine knew. About why seithr had increased in force in one night and dyed Ishana's atmosphere.

There was a hole in the barrier; and that the power that could prevent seithr getting to Ishana's air was gone. What had been holding back seithr was neither the barrier nor the pure atmosphere. It was an even more different factor.

(Celica...)

Her younger sister was born special. Somehow, she had never caught cold or even got illness. From when she had trouble in speaking, she had been handling healing magic. She possessed an abnormal life force.

The strange physical constitution of Celica, who only specialized in healing, had a special characteristic of restraining seithr's activity just by existing.

The theory on how she could do it was unknown. Because Nine also never thought to do clarification of it, she also shouldn't be able to prove it now. Naturally, the Ten Sages didn’t even know about Celica's physical constitution.

The only thing clearly known was, what preventing the seithr influx was the result of Celica's idiosyncrasy affecting Ishana's

atmosphere. Then, for seithr to be flowing meant that Celica had already gone from the island.

(Where did you go... Celica.)

Nine grasped her fists tightly above her lap.

Yesterday's night, it was already very late when she returned home. Because she thought Celica would have been asleep, Nine didn't check her room and went to bed. She hated herself for it.

That time, Celica must have already gone from the house.

If she could, she would immediately rush out of here and then proceed to find Celica. However.

"If we leave the seithr as it is, the barrier we have been protecting until now would become a lid and the whole island would be filled with seithr. If such a thing happened... the dense seithr would notify the Black Beast about our existences, and that monster would appear in the island."

The elderly woman who was the most senior even among the Ten Sages heavily spoke.

Seithr was a portion of Black Beast, its vanguard, and also passage. In other words, when a location had seithr, it was assuredly be a place that had potential of Black Beast appearing.

While seithr was spreading throughout the world, Ishana was the only exception. However, that exception was over now.

Trying to follow the elderly woman, other Ten Sages opened their mouths one after another.

"If Black Beast appeared, this island would be helpless. We

must restore the barrier at once, and stop the seithr influx!"

"The threat is not just the Black Beast. If mankind came into contact with dense seithr for a long period of time, bad effects would appear in their mind and body. Think about the potential of massive outbreak of seithr poisoning patients, too!"

"Restoring the barrier takes too much time. Removing the barrier temporarily and form it again is more..."

"Ridiculous! It's same as stripping the island naked. If it's done poor, disturbing elements from outside would get in!"

"Still, the seithr density in Ishana is higher even when compared with outside of the island."

"Even if we form the barrier again or restoring the current one, during the time, the people of this island will continue to get exposed with seithr. I wonder if there's nothing we could do to deal with the islanders just now."

If the barrier didn't get closed, the seithr density on the island would continue to raise. But while the barrier were getting closed, there would be enough potential that Black Beast would sniff out the dense seithr and appear.

Currently, Ishana was confronting a crisis it had never encountered before.

The meeting was only flooded with several claims; the landing point still couldn't be seen.

Toward it, Nine quietly formed her hands to fists; the mouth that had been fastened until then opened.

"Restoring the barrier and disposing seithr are urgent duties that only we, Ten Sages, can do. Neither of them can be given priority. We have to divide Ten Sages to two groups,

simultaneously taking measures. ...Immediately."

It wasn't the situation to crowd the desk and arguing.

With the cold, calm words, the place got silent uniformly.

Everyone was considering if that was feasible. No matter which one they did, the strengths of everyone in this room were needed.

But finally, the male leader made a fist and talked.

"Indeed. I shall take it upon myself to restore the barrier. Nine, you are in charge of eliminating seithr."

"...Yes."

While leaving her chair, Nine nodded.

Nine also understood it wasn't a simple task. For everything to end, a considerable amount of time would be needed. It would be already too late to chase after Celica.

Even so, Nine couldn't let herself to abandon her duty before this situation.

Because in this island, in this town, there was a home for Celica to return.

Under the command of the male leader, the few number of Ten Sages even at the best of times got furthermore fewer as they were divided into two groups. Then, in order to neutralize and remove the seithr that was filling the island, Nine ran toward Ishana's town.

The Ten Sages were hurriedly getting out of the Cathedral. Kazuma had been watching it from the academy's hallway while resting his chin in his hand by the window frame.

Usually, many students went back and forth in front of the classrooms. As today was a holiday, it was quiet as there was nobody. Unexpectedly in the uninhabited hallway, the stagnate sunlight pouring from windows was warm.

In the vicinity of the Cathedral that was visible from the window, nobody was there anymore.

With the critical situation that wasn't strange for Black Beast to appear any moment, they must have thought that no person would purposely go into the Cathedral. All the members of Mage’s Guild who usually stood guard had also left in order to assist the Ten Sages.

Looking at it this way, the Cathedral was quite tiny, and very lovely. Seemingly have nothing to do with the magnificent organization Mage’s Guild, it also looked like a chapel in a corner of public park.

"If it's really like that, I'd be more willingly to approach it."

While removing the hand which held his chin from the window frame, Kazuma raised the edges of his lips to make a bitter smile.

Appeared to be harmless, the deeper he went, there was bound to be strong barrier activated.

Nonetheless, it was laid out by human in the end. There was no way an object that was made by human's hands couldn't be broken by human's hands.

"Well then. Guess I should I go."

Dutifully closing the opened window, Kazuma put both hands in the pockets of his trousers and started walking.

It was then when there was a noise of shoes hitting the hallway.

With seemingly faint fragrance fluttering about, a short figure of a person appeared from the stairway's landings.

A bright colored robe which completely covered the entire body from the head; stunning platinum blonde hair overflowing from there. Big round eyeglasses, and clear green pupils behind it.

"Where are you going to?"

To the voice that was like sickeningly sweet sugar candy, Kazuma vigilantly showed a smile.

"...I see you've come, Trinity Glassfille-san."

Part 4

At the time he recognized the figure, Kazuma thought that it was unexpected while simultaneously realized that it was understandable.

He thought that if she were to come, it would be now.

As he stopped his feet at the borderline between the hallway and staircase, Kazuma gazed at the girl who was like a character from a fairy-tale. Only a few hours ago, he just saw her off from his dormitory's room. Although the look on Kazuma's glint in the eye shouldn't be visible from Trinity's side.

"Did you follow me? When you put your true face like this, you're unexpectedly an ill-natured person."

When Kazuma meekly displayed a sarcastic smile, Trinity, seemingly sad, shook her head.

"It's not that I followed you. I've been waiting for you at the academy's courtyard. And then, I saw your figure from that window~."

"Oh, my goodness. I didn't notice it."

Trying to pass it as joke, Kazuma shrugged his shoulders. Just because he got caught, it still didn't matter.

Seemingly understood about it too, Trinity tried to talk while making a feeble smile.

"You're... planning to go to the Cathedral, aren't you."

"Why do you think so?"

"The other day, you spoke of it at the Great Library."

While trying to use gentle and calm tone, Trinity spoke dignifiedly.

Kazuma raised his eyebrows.

"This is surprising. Does that mean you've been monitoring me since that time?"

"Monitoring is..."

Finally in Trinity's tone of voice, the usual girlish delicate feelings blurred in.

Kazuma began to grin.

"The one who gave the instruction is Nine-san, right?"

Trinity remained tight-lipped, but she didn't deny it.

Kazuma smiled more and more deeply.

"Oh my, women are terrifying indeed. While monitoring, you even invited me to drink tea."

As she was being told of ill-spoken things, Trinity's eyes quickly got seemingly sad and clouded.

If it were some time ago, he would be worried about it even for a little; but now, it was unbearably amusing. About to begin to laugh unintentionally, Kazuma was barely able to gulp it down.

"I'm sorry, but I can't keep chatting with you forever. If you have a business, then please be quick. Even though things may appear this way, I have to hurriedly do something."

It was pleasant to ridicule Trinity, but there was a limit to the allowed time. It was unlikely for the Ten Sages to come back soon. But if there were Mage's Guild's spare persons wandering around, it would be a bother; so he couldn't let it happen.

"Go ahead", urged Kazuma as he tilted his head. Then Trinity in her ways stiffened her expression. With a bit determined tone of voice, she began to talk.

"Please don't go to the Cathedral."

"But I haven't said anything about going to Cathedral, have I?"

"Even so, you're planning to go there, right? It's forbidden to enter the Cathedral without permission. Besides, the door was currently locked... there's no excuse if you enter it on your own."

"Then I won't go inside. Too bad, I guess."

"Well then," nodded Kazuma as he started to walk to slip through beside Trinity.

But before he passed through, his arm got held by Trinity, forcibly restraining him.

Kazuma involuntarily halted his feet and turned his head. With both hands, Trinity grabbed Kazuma's arm tightly. Her desperate and serious gaze looked this way.

"...You can't go to the Cathedral."

Obstinately, she repeated it again.

Astonished, Kazuma sighed and displayed it by shaking his head.

"Really, what an annoying person. It sounds like you think I will go to the Cathedral whatever the case."

"Then, can you please not go there?"

The sincere green eyes stared at Kazuma.

Those eyes must be somehow reflecting the current him. It wasn't worth worrying about, but Kazuma felt a little bit of interest. Nonetheless, it really wasn't worth worrying about. He shrugged his thin shoulders.

"If I say ' I won't go'... will you believe it?"

"No. Until the situation has been settled, please stay with me."

"Oh ho, an immediate reply. How heartless."

As for Trinity's serious tone of voice, Kazuma lightly retaliated as if laughing at it.

It was unbearably amusing every time the affectionate green eyes wavered as if they were hurt. Sadistic feeling gushed forth in his chest.

While his mouth smirking, Kazuma shifted the provocative eyes from the gap in his bangs.

"Please don't make such a grim face. It's almost like your face is saying you'll use force if I refuse."

"If it's necessary... I plan to do so."

"Well, well. I cannot think that those are the words from the gentle Trinity Glassfille-san."

"KAZUMA-SAN!"

Like scolding a troublesome kid, Trinity raised her voice. Although so, it was her after all; it was miles away from Nine's intimidating vigor.

A tone of voice that would make anyone with normal conscience speechless in an instant; a tone that stirred up guilt.

"It's not like I know all about what Kazuma-san's trying to do~. However... your action will put Nine and Ten Sages, also Mage's Guild in meaningless chaos. If something further happened, not just Nine, there's a potential that Mage's Guild itself will regard you as dangerous, you know?"

The eyes of Trinity who spoke of persuasion had very much of a sincere look.

Looking her back, Kazuma laughed as if making fun of it.

"You seem to say that I'm the source of all troubles. Unless I opened the hole in the barrier, it's not necessarily mean that I

lured in the seithr in though."

"No. Seithr has flown in because of Kazuma-san."

Trinity declared her denial. That tone of voice wasn't accusing in the least; it was transparent as fresh water.

"Last night, you informed Celica-san about the tearing in the barrier. And then you guided Celica-san so she could use it to get outside."

"You're speaking as if you saw it."

Kazuma cut the conversation to tease her, but Trinity didn't respond to it.

She knew. She did know. The reason Kazuma took Celica out from the island, and the words he used to tempt Celica.

Proofing it logically wasn't necessary. Trinity knowing about it was the whole truth, so Kazuma also wasn't going to deny it anymore now.

Trinity tried to moderate her voice a bit and continued.

"Celica-san has a particular ability from when she was small. That ability somehow appears to have a characteristic of suppressing down seithr... Therefore even if a hole opened in the barrier, seithr wouldn't be able to get into Ishana. However, since you took Celica-san outside..."

The force which opposed seithr was no longer there, and Ishana's air became identically polluted like the outside.

"Hmm," muttered Kazuma as the eyes inside his bangs were squinting. Curiosity sparkled in those eyes.

"That is convenient. Because of it, those eyesores of Ten Sages got driven out from Cathedral."

He didn't aware of Celica's physical constitution, but it was fortunate indeed.

This was surely fate. Also true for when he met Celica by chance and encountering Terumi. Standing here at this moment was also one.

With uplifting feeling steadily increasing, Kazuma embraced such a thought in his mind.

As Kazuma appeared to be somewhat enjoying himself, Trinity stared at him intensely with reproachful look.

"Don't say such a thing like eyesores. She and the others are now desperately doing their best in order to protect the island we live in."

Strength was put into Trinity's fingers which were gripping Kazuma's arm.

It was the unreliable grip of a powerless girl. He didn't feel even a tiny speck of pain. But strangely, Kazuma sensed an undeniable spirit. Smile was erased from his face.

Trinity lifted her eyebrows, fully raising her round chin, and looked up to Kazuma to urge him.

"Do you understand, Kazuma-san? If you make the mistake, you'll get expelled from the academy or even from the island. You may also be given a more severe punishment."

As if to say that she couldn't deal with those, Trinity's voice wavered. With gentle and pleasantly soft voice, she persuaded him as if she was praying.

"I... regard Kazuma-san as an important friend. Certainly, Nine can't keep her eyes off from you like you've said~. And I'm also worried about your behaviors. Even if you say it as

monitoring, I feel like it can't be helped. But it's definitely not a danger like you're being cautious about. I've just always been worried about you..."

The green eyes emotionally got wet.

Kazuma wondered if she was about to cry, but although tears were accumulated on Trinity's eyes, they didn't drop.

"For some time, something has drastically changed in Kazuma-san. It's like you got mixed up with something mysterious... You appear to always have a dark shadow beside you. It's like it's taking the Kazuma Kuvaru-san I know to a place of no return... I've always been uneasy."

"The Kazuma Kuvaru... you know?"

Kazuma briefly repeated Trinity's words. It was downright strange sounding.

Kazuma Kuvaru. It was the only name representing himself; but it felt very empty and worthless now.

He wondered if that was the 'place of no return' Trinity was talking about.

Trinity's hands pulled Kazuma's arm to hold it tight.

The distance between them grew closer. The mood which Trinity was clad in was similar to the smell of sweet candy or flower; it grazed his skin and made him felt uneasy.

The persistent clear eyes that had been truly sincere were reflecting Kazuma, not letting him go.

"The Kazuma-san I know is a kind person. He's indiscriminately gentle toward any person. And If I greeted him, he'd always answer with a smile. Although I'm speaking

sluggishly like this, he'd listen properly. I understand that Kazuma-san feels bothered about losing your memory, but the memory-less you are a great person."

It was obvious that Trinity spoke the thoughts from her true feelings unhesitatingly.

And similarly, it was also obvious that she unhesitatingly trusted Kazuma.

He would definitely realize about it if they spoke of it. Her strong trust of a feeling gave off sincerity that was enough to make even Kazuma surprised.

"I beg of you. Please... don't do anything dangerous anymore. Other than that, I'll do anything in my power no matter what it is. So...!"

Trinity's hands clung to Kazuma's arm tighter.

It looked like she firmly vowed in her heart never to release these hands. If he let loose of these hands, there would be no returning again for Kazuma. He harbored such belief.

Kazuma didn't return the words immediately. As if he got astonished, as if he was admiring it. Similar feelings while also like different sentiments; several of them were probably got mixed up.

After a little while, Kazuma deeply sighed and let tension out from his shoulders as if he was exhausted.

"...Understood. I understood very well, Trinity Glassfille-san."

As Kazuma spoke like he was giving up, with a relief to the point she would burst into tears any moment, Trinity's expression broadened.

"Then...!"

"Yes."

As gentle as he could, Kazuma smiled at her.

"You are a hopeless fool."

No sooner after he finished, Kazuma held up his hand in front of Trinity's face.

Before the large green eyes could blink in bewilderment... an invisible shock wave fired from Kazuma's hand blew Trinity away.

Like a thrown away doll, the fragile woman's body crashed the wall beside the staircase. Dull crashing sound played; and as if dragging it longer, she collapsed to the cold floor.

Without even groaning in pain, she lost consciousness.

While looking at the helplessly collapsed Trinity, Kazuma put both hands into his trousers' pockets again. Casually stepping close to her, he looked down on the disordered platinum blonde which was falling to the floor.

"Geez~, you're really foolish. Someday, you'll lose your life because of that stupidity, you know? It'd be better to be more careful. ...Oh, you can't hear me already. Hahaha."

He burst out laughing. While the welling up laughter resounded loudly within the hallway, Kazuma leisurely descended on the academy's staircase he frequently commuted.

Chapter 6: Voice of Emerald Evil

Part 1

When he left the academy's school building into courtyard, he thought that the weather outside felt nice.

The sky appeared hazier than the usual. There were signs of it turning slightly dark.

Facing the whole city, he wondered if the Ten Sages in charge of purifying seithr had produced any result. The way things were going, their hands would still be full for a while.

Kazuma went across the silent courtyard which felt weird since he got used to the usual Mage's Guild. He headed toward the Cathedral which was standing still in the middle.

The meandering path was refreshing as if it was a promenade through a forest.

Lying in wait in the middle, the Cathedral was just as small as viewed from the hallway's window back then. It didn't seem likely for it to be storage for Mage's Guild's classified information.

Similar to a chapel, the front side's wooden doors acted like a pair of double doors. Just as Trinity had said, there was secure lock there.

But for this island that had been raising magicians, things like physical lock only had the significance of a sign which had 'Do not enter without permission' written on it. With short incantation and small pattern drawn by fingertip, the lock allowed Kazuma to continue all too soon.

After he got inside, he closed the doors. As he proceeded, the place was silent like it was a different airspace.

The air inside the building was a little warm compared to the

outdoors.

Kazuma went ahead. It seemed there was nobody inside. It was granted as a matter of course.

In the history of Mage's Guild, today was the most critical situation. During such circumstances, there was no way for someone having knowledge of magic which was purposed for security to just stand here.

And rather, the guardsmen for Cathedral were in charge of giving warning.

As there was nothing but a large hall on the Cathedral's ground floor, there was no reason to get rid of intruders. What was absolutely forbidden to enter was what beyond here, the Cathedral's underground.

On the door leading to underground, there was a severely secure barrier imbued. If he were to carelessly approach it, he wouldn't get out with just a scratch.

The guardsmen were assigned to give warning to anyone who carelessly approached the barrier.

In front of the entrance which was leading to underground, Kazuma stood.

"...This looks troublesome."

What was lying in wait for Kazuma was a wooden door which was heavy from the looks of it. It appeared it was enveloped in a slightly white haze.

Judging by the heightened magical power that was visible, it was a barrier.

Kazuma wasn't poor at cancelling barrier during class, but this

one was a different case. When he cautiously stretched his hand... he felt uncomfortable feeling on his fingers.

Just by drawing near a strong barrier, that person's skin would get burned in order to repel him. However, this door was nothing like that.

Kazuma's fingers were hanging close to the door while he hesitated whether to touch it or not. But immediately, he boldly placed his hand on the door.

His breath got taken away reflexively. He had prepared for the appropriate impact and damage.

But even after three whole seconds had elapsed, Kazuma was still silently grabbing the door's knob.

When he put strength into it, the door opened.

The barrier was still functioning. Kazuma's hand broke through it and opened the door.

"What's the meaning of this...?"

Even when he muttered, no one answered.

Although he was confused, Kazuma narrowly slipped through the door and stepped inside. It was baffling, but if he could get in, then he wouldn't hesitate.

Inside the door was continuation of hallway which had arched ceiling. In the inner part, there was stairway leading downward to underground.

The magical lights which were floating at fixed intervals illuminated Kazuma's walking path.

As he went underground, the structure became more and more expansive. On the upper level, there were a meeting

room and a room used to observe various data; both were used by all members of Mage's Guild.

Moreover as he went further downward, a meeting room that sometimes had been used for Ten Sages' ceremonies appeared.

On each level, there were erected barriers which strength matched the ability of the human who was authorized to utilize it. They weren't such things that could be lifted by the likes of students at all.

But likewise, Kazuma's body was able to continue ahead as the barriers couldn't stop him; as if he slipped through mesh of net that was separating foreign matters.

When the long downward stairway ended, he now arrived at an elevator which was controlled by magic. He also passed the barrier which had been applied for security purpose.

As if he was being guided——Kazuma arrived at the lowest level of the Cathedral.

After he got out of the elevator, the hallway's ceiling grew tall which made it unlikely that it was in underground. As expected, a wooden door awaited beyond that point.

Like stamped seal, a magic circle appeared on the door.

No one but Ten Sages was permitted to come here. Moreover, since a suitable magical power was needed, a barrier with ruthless degree of security was applied that if somebody touched it by mistake, they wouldn't get spared as it would result in death.

Shutting his mouth tightly, Kazuma touched the last guardian with a sullen look.

His fingers touched the wooden surface. After sliding them like he was tracing something, this time the palm touched it completely.

What he felt on his skin was just the firmness on an old, normal tree. It felt like if he were holding an axe, he could easily tear it down.

There was no handle on the door. As he pushed, it slowly opened as expected.

Of course, being able to get here made even Kazuma to frown in confusion.

Why couldn't the Cathedral's barriers stop Kazuma? Not even once had he used cancelling magic, but he still managed to arrive at the lowest level.

"It's like... I'm being invited in."

Not matching its old appearance, the door silently opened as Kazuma passed through it while he muttered.

Beyond the door was a breathtakingly vast circular room.

The ceiling was even taller compared to the hallway's. Although there wasn't any magical lighting device floating, the whole room seemed to be slightly luminescent as it was faintly bright.

The floor had mosaic tiles; a stretched large flower-like pattern was depicted from the center to the outside. If it wasn't a flower, it would be sun or flame pattern.

While stepping forward to the outermost petals, Kazuma looked around the surroundings.

Although the inside of the room was absurdly spacious, it was

empty. It was nothing but a deserted room. Rather than the storage for classified information, it was like as if some kind of a ceremony were about to begin at the place.

The drifting air had a different kind of coolness from the outside. It might be because there was no window and he didn't know the direction that he forgot about the current time.

When he took a step forward, the small, hard noise of footsteps disappeared like it was absorbed into the floor.

And at the same time, he felt the beating inside his chest accelerated.

"Here... Azure is..."

Kazuma must be thinking that he had obtained the means to reach the Azure. Before he noticed it, Kazuma had been intending to get the Azure itself.

It wasn't reasonable anymore. It went beyond reasoning as it felt like instinct.

The inside of the room was even warmer than the surface. It was like he was within the warmth of a living being. The faint drifting heat slowly agitated Kazuma's spirits.

But for some reason, while he was walking further, Kazuma also gradually got impatient.

There was nothing here. If there was no document or data, a map indicating where the Azure was wouldn't exist.

But it was impossible that there was nothing here. Terumi definitely said it was here.

"Terumi-san!"

Inside the room where there was nobody, Kazuma raised his

voice.

His voice echoed on the ceiling.

"I managed to get inside the Cathedral. Where is the Mage's Guild's classified information!?"

Kazuma hadn't been guessing for it to be here; it was Terumi who said it. But if that was the case, what could this nothing but vast room hold?

He looked up at the ceiling to search for Terumi's presence that shouldn't have been here. While he looked around the room, little by little Kazuma's steps became wider as he walked toward the inner part of the room.

It was when he arrived at the center of the hall.

"Soooo, you finally arrived~. Don't make me wait so long, Kazuma-chan."

Terumi's voice could be heard.

Taken aback, Kazuma looked around the surroundings. However, Terumi's figure was nowhere. Although there was no spot to hide, he couldn't even find a part of his shadow.

Despite that, Terumi's voice got even more audible.

"I got worried since you're so late, y'know? I've been wondering if you don't care about Azure anymore and instead got along with those women to have a fun time enjoying tea~ ...while forgetting everything completely."

"Give me a break. Don't say such a disgusting thing."

Facing the invisible friend, Kazuma showed an unambitious smile.

While manipulating his face, Kazuma sharpened his glare to search around the room.

When Terumi started to talk, no doubt some kind of a situation had developed.

The few days of his first meeting with Terumi, each time he appeared, Kazuma's world one-by-one changed colors. The old days which were like invisible labyrinth had turned into a path.

It would be the same this time, surely. Bearing such feeling, Kazuma answered to the empty sky.

"Didn't I make a promise with you that I would definitely reach it? ...Besides, above all, I want to recover it."

In low voice, Kazuma spoke of his real motive. At that moment, frivolous smile already disappeared from his mouth.

He no longer hesitated. Inside Kazuma's chest, there was only a yearning toward Azure.

"Really? You really want to get it back? Obtaining Azure means you won't ever go back. Even if you regretted it, you wouldn't be able to let it go. You really still fine even like that?"

Terumi's question that was asked at this stage instead seemed to encourage Kazuma's thought. Naturally, Kazuma didn't intend to go against it.

"There won't be any regret. I'll obtain it. All this time, I've been wishing for it only."

The real him.

Who he should be.

Although even his shadow wasn't in sight, he knew that

Terumi was grinning.

"Then... look. It's just right there, isn't it?"

"Right there?"

Questioning, Kazuma again looked around the surrounding.

The truly vast room where he stood alone was silent, as if time had stopped.

It might be his imagination, but currently, the flow of time here felt slow.

"It's there. Just right there. Look, it's really close to you..."

The voice that came from the strained throat teased Kazuma on purpose. It whispered at him awfully close.

"It's... below your feet."

Then, he was attacked by goose bumps.

Rather than a chill that ran on his spine, it was a sensation like a flaming hot snake crawling up.

Kazuma followed the urging from the snake on his spine and looked down on his feet.

Before he knew it, both of Kazuma's feet stepped firmly at the very center of the hall. The core of the large flower, sun, and swirling flame of a pattern.

The floor was polished, just like a mirror. There was a reflection of him looking right here. His eyes met the eyes of the other side's image.

Disorderedly growing long bangs, slender feet and thin shoulders, a familiar academy uniform. It was the usual him.

As if he got drawn in, Kazuma put one knee down to the spot and bent over.

Toward the circular center of the mosaic tiles, he gently placed his hand.

That instant——.

"...!"

His voice didn't come out.

As both his and the image's palms touched each other, his body trembled like it was petrified. He got frozen on the spot.

Following the hand that touched the floor, something was getting inside Kazuma.

Like a storm that caused surging waves, it was a tremendous torrent of information.

Part 2

Seven years ago... Mage's Guild, Ishana, barrier... the safest island in the world.

Relius Clover... dream... Shuuichirou Ayatsuki... white haired man... 'someone' madly laughing.

...The room with a Cauldron.

Phrases, history, time... Black Beast... Past... A hundred years...

Kazuma Kuvaru.

Yuuki Terumi.

... .

The surging information hit Kazuma's body like they were thrown stones. They rushed to his brain.

Behind his eyes, sparks were scattering. With dizziness eating his soul, it almost like his flesh was melting into something.

He wasn't allowed to reject it or surrender. The enormous information was flowing forcefully on its own; just like a full glass of water which got drunk in one gulp, soaking inside Kazuma.

If he were to express that feeling with a word... then it would be ecstasy. A trembling pleasant feeling that even caught a glimpse of trance.

Similar to the feeling when someone inserted the last piece of a puzzle. Similar to the feeling when slightly off shadows overlapped into one.

Desired objects going into the desired place. It was such a coherent pleasure.

"That's why... That's why I... had to come here."

While slowly removing his palm from the floor, Kazuma's lips slightly moved as he muttered. Not even a slight doubt remained in that voice anymore.

Likewise, the thin and tall body slowly stood up.

Right after raising his face, he looked directly at the man standing in front of him.

Terumi was there.

As usual, from inside the low hood which was intended to hide his expression, eyes like those of snake's aiming at a prey were looking at Kazuma. The splitting mouth, which was about to smile, gave answer to put on airs.

"It's meaningless unless here. You can't find place like this even if you search the world after all."

"And Relius Clover... the man who created me knew it from the very beginning, didn't he?"

Kazuma remembered everything.

No, recovered everything was more appropriate.

That was because the memories he had to remember were never existed inside Kazuma.

Seven years ago, the day when he arrived at Ishana while amnesiac was truly the first day in Kazuma's life. That day, that time, Kazuma's time started.

Kazuma wasn't tied by nature unlike a born child.

He was an existence manufactured by Relius Clover by making full use of magic, alchemy, and science.

Not remembering anything and wound healing at bizarre rate were also none other than modification made by Relius.

He gained form as an existence eight years ago. A few months later, he got transported to Ishana.

His consciousness as an existence woke up seven years ago. And then for seven years period of time, he continued to live academy life as Kazuma Kuvaru.

Then why was Kazuma created?

That was because he would become the man before his eyes... Yuuki Terumi's body.

"January 1st six years ago. During Relius Clover's trial experiment, Black Beast appeared. I was around during the time, you see. That time, my body went *poof*. My spirit form also got injured and took five whole years to heal. Then I asked that damn Relius for another body... in short, he told me to find you. Y'know there's a ridiculous barrier set around Ishana, right? What kind of joke was that? It ain't funny."

Although his mouth was torn into crescent moon shape, Terumi cursed while speaking. Rough footsteps resounded as Terumi walked around Kazuma with unnaturally slow pace.

"More about my troubles, you didn't even recognize me. You're the first body that gives me a pain in the ass."

"That's... must be troublesome."

Kazuma spontaneously showed a smile. There was a hint of detest somewhere on how Terumi smile.

Looking at Kazuma with his covered eyes, Terumi unusually snorted as he wasn't amused.

Trying to ignore what he had heard, Kazuma dropped his gaze to his feet.

He had now truly understood what object the mosaic tiles were depicting. What the crude picture was indicating was some kind of bright red lava he saw in his dream the other day.

——The Cauldron.

"Until a short while ago, I couldn't even imagine for Cauldron to exist in Ishana. Then again, I didn't even know regarding

the existence of an object called the Cauldron."

Kazuma made noises as he hit the tile on the center of the room with his tiptoe.

The Cauldron was an object similar to a volcano's crater. Once, it was excavated from deep underground because of humanity's hands. Inside, red flames were dancing as if denying living beings. There was an airspace called the Boundary stretched at the core.

And there was one purpose for the core.

Master Units. They were omnipotent existences which only purpose was to keep observing every space-time and all existences within. They were often likened to god.

So to speak, the Boundary was a domain ruled by god.

"Since the time Mage's Guild was established... No, since roughly thousands of years ago, this Cauldron has existed here. It has been maintaining Mage's Guild's status and presence."

It felt impressive as he thought about it. Kazuma had great admiration toward the collection of tiles below his feet.

Having a Cauldron meant one would be able to monopolize the strength of omnipotent god.

Of course, monopolizing was nothing but only a mere end. However, the power was enough for a single organization to preserve overwhelming superiority on the hidden part of history.

"The thing's a fake made by humans. It ain't the true Cauldron."

Standing at the center across from Kazuma, Terumi also looked down at his feet.

Originally, the Cauldron had a form like a crater holding sea of flames. This one imitated it; an artificial Cauldron created by mankind in order to draw the power of Boundary.

Kazuma and Terumi stood on the middle of that crater.

"Yes, I agree. The original isn't like this."

Kazuma himself had never set eyes at the actual Cauldron. But still, the stuff which had been inputted into his brain understood about it.

"But it's still important. The ability to make contact with Boundary alone is enough."

While speaking, Kazuma's vision wandered around to view the whole Cauldron.

When he looked up at the wide and tall ceilings, there were things like hook extending from the walls supporting strange engravings midair. It was just like some kind of a coffin.

Kazuma recited the characters engraved there as he read them.

"...*When light emitted from heaven scorches a city, goddess of destruction and creation will be born*..."

"Huh, so you can read it."

"Well, I'm a student of the Mage's Guild after all."

Although Kazuma replied Terumi's teasing with a wry smile, even if he made use of the knowledge taught to him for seven years, he didn't understand the significance of these words and the coffin's true identity.

However, even if this place was an artificial imitation, it was surely connected with the Boundary. He understood that this place was the very thing of Mage's Guild's secrecy itself.

"...I had to recall that I'm Terumi-san's body. Nah, maybe it's better to say that I definitely had to realize it. And you couldn't tell me since I had to be aware on my own."

Kazuma spoke while facing Terumi. He verified the flow of information transmitted from Boundary one by one.

It was like some kind of a ceremony. No, that itself was a ceremony.

Body and soul. For the purpose of overlapping both shadows into one.

Terumi extended his arm that was as thin as Kazuma's.

"It's useless if I told you who *I* am. You gotta recognize who I am with your own eyes."

"Hence, the Boundary's power was needed."

The Cauldron was connected with the Boundary. All kinds of wisdom existed in the Boundary. Even the knowledge about Terumi's previous body.

Because he came in contact with the Boundary, Kazuma had obtained all information regarding Terumi.

The air suddenly got dense. Before long, they were able to sense the other party's breathing.

It was really dense even when compared to the atmosphere between Kazuma and Terumi.

It was hard to tell which direction the heat came from.

Kazuma took a short breath.

"Ishana, the world's safest city. There is a Cauldron intended to connect with the Boundary here. A control system to keep foreign enemies away and barrier to thwart the Black Beast and seithr also exist. That was why Relius Clover chose this island to store me."

Terumi chuckled as he laughed.

"Thanks to that, I got in big troubles... But on the good side, since you're here everything was completed in a single whoop. That's Professor Relius for you; way to make me feel indebted."

Shadow extending from Kazuma's feet.

Similarly, shadow also extending from Terumi's feet.

Both of them thought it was trivial however abnormal that scene was.

Kazuma stared at Terumi and spoke.

"Like you have promised, I have recovered everything."

Terumi stared at Kazuma and spoke.

"And I'm also a free man at last. Good work."

There was but only single lump of shadow now. Although each other faced a different entity, there was a pretense that both had the same face and also the same individual.

Two kinds of mucus that were put in the same vessel being slowly mixed by a thin stick; such feeling was surrounding Kazuma and Terumi.

It was by no means disgusting. Rather, it was pleasant.

Because it was the appearance he desired.

Because it was the role he sought.

(That's right. I've always...)

Wished for it. About his true self. About the meaning of his existence. About the necessity to keep on living.

And there were all here. If this didn't please him, then what would?

"——Aah, it's here."

"Yes, I know."

Toward the presence that slightly grazed their skin, Terumi and Kazuma simultaneously retracted their feet and turned around.

Where their face was facing was the only entrance of this innermost room.

"The brute has appeared."

It was unclear who had sneered.

Between the pair of doors that had been left wide open, a familiar small silhouette stood.

Part 3

"Kazuma Kuvaru... isn't it."

Like a sharpened blade, a small shadow spoke with sharp, cold voice.

A stature about as tall as children, triangular ears protruding on top of the head, and swaying tails on the back.

The beastkin swordsman, Tomonori.

The other day, his hands carried a pair of short swords. They were now gripping a large and heavy sword. Stored in jet black sheath, it held a strange pressure.

While focusing on Kazuma, Tomonori unsheathed the sword without any hesitation. The distinct noise of sword being unleashed echoed coldly. Receiving the indoor lights that resembled moon light, the silver blade gleamed brightly.

"Well, well. Umm... Tomonori-san, is it? You still give such a vicious greeting."

Raising both hands near his shoulders as if giving up, Kazuma gave an unmotivated smile.

That moment, Tomonori's already sharp eyes shone even more grimly.

"...As I thought."

With bitter regret oozing, Tomonori muttered with hoarse, low voice.

"I should have killed you back then and not fearing to catch any attention..."

"Oh no, killing me? Please don't say such scary thing. Even if I look this way, I dislike violence, you see?"

Still raising both hands, Kazuma tried to play innocent. But as if not caring about it, Tomonori displayed his thirst for blood.

"This time I will surely... kill you."

The announcement itself was like a blade.

The ruthlessness would freeze the muscles of any normal

person and paralyze their feet with fear. However, Kazuma just looked at Terumi and tilted his neck in puzzlement.

"Whew, he looks fully motivated. What a bother."

"There's other place you can find as your scratching post y'know, lil' cat~?"

Terumi pointed his chin while blatantly provoking him.

But Tomonori didn't reply it with unnecessary words. Still silent, he measured his reach. Not the reach to intimidate, but the reach to kill.

"Ooh ignoring me, I see. Or maybe you don't understand human language? Hyahhaha."

"It's understandable. After all, it's forbidden to enter this place. And yet he's still hesitating. He's really one confused stray cat."

Agreeing with the sneering Terumi, Kazuma played innocent while making a face like he was truly astonished. A cruel smile showed on his lips.

"This is troubling. If he goes on rampage in this place, the Ten Sages might suspect something. But... well, maybe this is good for warming up."

"Hey, don't get carried away. My bad but I'll pass on playing with cat!"

Toward Terumi's mockery, Tomonori slightly drew his nose. But without saying anything back, he instead kicked the cold floor and rushed in like the wind.

He pulled the large sword far behind. As he landed, he horizontally made a straight slash to mow down Kazuma's

torso.

Kazuma jumped backward.

The slash grazed Kazuma's jacket as it cut through the air.

The cat's piercing eyes chased after Kazuma. Pursuing faster than before, he then diagonally slashed down.

While still leaping to retreat, Kazuma casted a short spell. Magical wind blew from the ground and weakened the attack. He used that gap to escape from the cold blade.

"Haha... hahaha. I see, I understood it now..."

He was thrilled. The thirst for blood that was pointed toward him felt tremendously pleasant.

He could move his body at will.

The confusion and panic when he previously encountered Tomonori in the city were nowhere to be seen. Rather, this situation was entertaining, enjoyable. Naturally, he burst into a hearty laughter.

"More... You should put more effort now. Don't you want to kill me? It should be easy. I'm just an incompetent student. I can't wield weapon like you."

"Don't get carried away... you monster."

Lowering his posture, Tomonori groaned.

The hatred lingered in his voice tickled Kazuma's spinal cord again.

"Fuh... hahaha. Monster? Me? A monster? Pardon me, but how can you say I'm a monster? I'm just pathetic mouse that can only run away, khukuku."

Desires came from the bottom of the laughing Kazuma as he jeered. He was in thirst. Of joy, pleasure, fear, terror, lament, and hatred.

Each time he looked at the eyes of the beast that had chilling murderous intent, his thirst was satisfied by a drop. That feeling was very, very very... irresistible.

Tomonori thrusted the sword he had set up horizontally.

Kazuma twisted his upper body and the sharp assault only grazed him.

At the same time, Terumi jumped from behind. He stretched his long, thin arms and grabbed Tomonori's arm before he could retract his blade.

"Man, you're boring... You gonna get killed, y'know?"

He whispered a threat while eerily smiling.

The next moment, Terumi pulled Tomonori's arm and kicked his abdomen which was covered by soft fur.

"Guh!"

Painful groan leaked from the cat's mouth. The small stature was blown off toward the hall's wall.

But midway, Tomonori turned his body and landed on the wall. Using the leaping momentum, he swiftly went to Kazuma with an even faster speed.

A strike. Kazuma dodged when they crossed. During the counter attack, the blade slashed Kazuma's arm.

"Ugh...!"

The sudden attack made Kazuma let out a distorted voice in

his pain. When he held his arm, something dripped from inside the torn clothes. The wound was deep.

Again, Tomonori went for a strike. Along with killing intent, the blade was going for a vertical slash.

There was no time to dodge. Kazuma crossed both hands on front of his face and casted a defensive magic while withdrawing with a large jump.

But the barrier was smashed by the blade. A shrilling noise echoed like a metal was violently hit. The broken barrier sent its user, Kazuma, flying behind.

"Guah...!"

Kazuma was thrown to the hard floor back first. His head got hit hard.

When the tip of Tomonori's sword reached, a small wound ran on Kazuma's crossed arm. Red liquid appeared on the wound before it finally began to drip a bit.

"Tch. Damn cat brute. Now you've done it."

After he landed with particularly light noise beside Kazuma, Terumi spoke cheerfully though he was also bitter. He grabbed Kazuma's arm and pulled him up as he spoke.

While holding his head as dizziness still remained in his head, Kazuma somehow was able to stand straight. The injured arm had numbing pain; and topping it, a burning feeling.

Looking at his arm, Kazuma frowned with dubious expression.

"What's... with this wound?"

The deep sword cut he got on his arm was shallow when he got it as his barrier was destroyed just now. That wound

wouldn't heal even a bit.

Because of Kazuma's self-healing ability on his body, the bleeding on his wound should have already been stopped the moment it started. Without any visible sign of healing, the blood continued to pour like it wouldn't ever get cured.

"Looks like you got some interesting trick going on."

Terumi scowled since he also realized Kazuma's unusual situation.

As if to put down Terumi's voice, Tomonori once again set up his sword.

"It seems to have an effect."

The low, hoarse voice of a cat spoke as if he understood something.

Kazuma and Terumi simultaneously fixed their eyes on the tiny swordsman.

A fearless feeling faintly appeared on Tomonori's calm expression.

"...Hihi'irokane."

The whisper wasn't directed to Kazuma nor Terumi, but to the sword on his hand.

The sword responded to the call. The sword, that was a little larger than the cat-type beastkin, beat once as if pulsing. Next, the shape changed like it was released from its restraint.

That shape was just like a beast's claws. The main part of the blade, which had multiplied to three, transformed into a rather grotesque shape, unbecoming of a sword.

"Hihi'irokane!?"

The one who raised his voice in shock was Terumi.

"That damn cat... He took out a huge toy!"

Beside the screaming Terumi, Kazuma also cautiously put himself on guard.

Hihi'irokane. Beside flesh, the sword would also eventually rip the dwelling soul.

The sword had directly cut Kazuma's flesh. It also had done the same to Terumi's spirit form.

When further examined, Terumi's arm certainly had a cut wound on the same area as Kazuma's.

A wound on spirit form wouldn't get easily healed. Furthermore, Kazuma's wound wasn't healing too.

"This looks... bad..."

Smile vanished from Kazuma's expression.

Blood flowing out along his thin arm. It dripped to the floor tiles from his fingertips. Red spots were engraved on his feet.

Tomonori raised the giant transformed sword and jumped low like a gale.

He diagonally swung it downward. Accompanied with thunderous roar which was like the groan of air surge, the shockwave-like wind pressure knocked Kazuma's whole body who had previously escaped.

Even though the blade didn't graze him, the sword's pressure made it even hard to breathe. His expression turned to anguish.

"If I got hit directly... Would I die, then?"

Kazuma had fallen over like he was thrown on the floor. He then tried to hold his bloody arm as he stood up while peeking at Terumi.

With a crooked smile, Terumi clicked his tongue. He glared at Tomonori while snorted.

"Wanna try?"

"Haha, don't joke around."

"...Quite a talkative man."

Tomonori spoke cold and severely. The sword on the tip of his hand growled. Even though he only fixed his stance.

"Those chatters will also end here."

"Ooh, scary. ... Oh wait, now's not the time to say that, is it?"

Kazuma pulled his lips and made a smile. But frankly, he couldn't afford to laugh. A rough noise resounded as his feet grazed the floor when he stepped back.

At this rate, it would truly be the end. He refused to accept it. Even though it was finally starting.

(Just... what's starting?)

Vaguely, Kazuma questioned himself.

Wrong. Rather than Kazuma, it was Terumi who had something to start.

No, whether it was Terumi or Kazuma, the line was awfully unclear.

The cat ran. Rather than a slash, the large and sharp blade of Hihi'irokane mowed down on Kazuma as if to gouge him.

In a hair breadth, Kazuma avoided the first attack.

But the sword's pressure grazed his thigh. That alone gave him pain like his flesh got torn.

Following it, Hihi'irokane approached.

Kazuma dragged his fallen posture while raising his eyes on the gale slash.

It was that moment.

"...!?"

His body shook violently.

From his feet, irresistible urge quickly rising up.

Lured by instinct, Kazuma dropped his gaze.

There was the room's central part. No, it was the Cauldron's central.

It was unknown whether what was coming up was the Boundary's power or the dwelling madness within his body.

Hopelessly uplifting feeling whispered.

‘'——Now, kill.

"Yes, I understood. I've understood everything. I've took it back. No.. more like it has returned. Isn't that right?"

It was a really serene sensation.

It was also supposed to be that way. Because now, at this very moment, the rightful soul went to the rightful place together. Completely established, without any slight of error.

"... Hi, haha... haha... hyahhahahahaha."

Aah, can't stop laughing. It's pleasant, really pleasant.

Kazuma faced Tomonori who was coming in straight line. As if reacting to it, he spread both of his arms.

"HURRY UP AND DIE ALREADY, YOU SHITTY CAAAAAAT!"

The piercing laughter changed; to a joyful voice full of ecstasy.

"———OUROBOROS!!"

Together with the call, the airspace on both Terumi's sides warped.

Eating and tearing the space that was supposed to be empty, chains possessing serpent head appeared.

The serpent chains travelled the air in a straight line... and diagonally from left and right, they pierced Tomonori's chest when he was rushing like the wind.

Part 4

Like meat being minced, a jarring noise was heard.

The body of the catman that had jumped leapt with giant sword in his hand was dragged by the shockwave that ate into his chest before it fell on the floor.

Although he had at least managed to avoid falling down clumsily, it was obvious that Tomonori got a considerably severe wound as stated by his face. He somehow used the sword that looked like giant claws to sustain his discomposed stance.

"HYAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! That's it... Attaboy! THIS is the feeling I'm talking about! I went six years to get this! Now it's back!"

Largely bending his body backward, Kazuma laughed even louder. His voice swirled on the tall ceiling. The commotion made the air inside the room trembled.

On the other side of the disordered bangs, Kazuma opened his eyes wide. The atrocity glaring in the glint of his eyes resembled that of reptiles. The grim expression warped and looked down on Tomonori.

"Khukuku... Nice posture, lil' cat~. What did you say? Killing me? Hihahaha. Fine, do it if you can!"

Again, the airspace on Kazuma's sides were torn as serpent chains rushed out. The squirming chains which resembled a creature trailed in the air and rushing on Tomonori.

With his battered body, Tomonori prepared his sword. With movement faster than the irregular chains, he jumped to dodge them. Using the gigantic sword, he shoved off the hungry shadow of the fangs.

At the same time, Tomonori leapt and chased after Kazuma before forcefully using Hihi'irokane to mow him down.

"Whoops!"

The intense slash severed the air.

Kazuma pulled himself up using a new chain, passing up above Tomonori, and went to the opposite side. Immediately after, he let out a sharp, spear-like chain. The tip of the serpent's head grazed Tomonori's shoulder as they passed each other, tearing it.

Stern anger appeared on the cat's face. The three-pronged sword roared and severed the crooked neck of the chain that had grazed his shoulder.

Deep underground, the unfolded battle that didn't even catch anyone's attention appeared to last forever.

Kazuma's chains scattered Tomonori's blood-stained fur. They pursued Tomonori's slow movement to scrape his flesh.

Not only blade, the pressure from Tomonori's sword also went for a slash attack toward the escaping Kazuma. The flowing artificial blood inside it scattered along the floor and wall.

In such situation, the one who made the conclusive movement were Kazuma's chains.

It had been several times for Tomonori to kick the floor and dashed in order to make a slash.

Responding to it, Kazuma launched two chains from the front. But before the two serpent heads get cleared away by the sword, he naturally wriggled their body to force them through Tomonori.

Ignoring both of his sides, Tomonori instantly closed the distance. Pure intent to kill showed in his sharp pupils.

The back that carried such frank tenacity was pierced from behind by the surrounding chains in one breath.

Wet noises resounded.

"Ugh...!"

A groan from dull pain leaked out of Tomonori's gritting teeth.

However, the beastkin swordsman seized the pair of chains which had pierced his body, raising his speed and continued to run without faltering. Taking along the squall-like momentum, he swung his sword down at Kazuma.

"Tch!"

Kazuma pulled back the chains. However, Tomonori's hand didn't allow him. The cold blade touched Kazuma's nape.

Just before that, Kazuma instantly concentrated defensive magic to a point and casted it.

A noise of metal clashing was dispersed, along with sparks.

As Kazuma's magic took the blow, what got repelled was... the small sword Tomonori drew with the hand that had been seizing the chains.

Kazuma noticed it late.

"I'll... kill you!"

Tomonori's voice was hoarse as it was mixed with blood. Something even deeper than desire was boiling in it.

Something called faith had to be there. Something called pride had to be there. Something called devotion had to there.

"HIHI'IROKANE!!"

The hand, which was large when compared to human's, swung the incredibly huge sword that had been hid out of sight until then. The roaring slash let out a beast's howl and also death throes.

Like the wind, the sword that appeared like three nails was... no, it was even faster than the wind.

It diagonally tore Kazuma's abdomen.

"————————!!"

Piercing scream gushed out from Kazuma's throat.

The slashed abdomen was like it had been gouged as it was roughly cleaved. Similar to choked throat, it spat out darkish blood. Kazuma, filled with shock and hatred, glared at Tomonori.

"Bastard... DON'T UNDERESTIMATE MEEEEEE!"

Still penetrating Tomonori's stomach, the chains once again thrusted at it and threw Tomonori's body onto the floor.

This time, Tomonori didn't scream or groan. He already wasn't even in the state to raise his voice or such. His battered body was pulled down by the chains and laid upside down on the floor. On the floor that was shining like mirror, a small fountain was created.

Something was overflowing from his belly. Starting from the

back, it dyed Tomonori's clothes and soft fur.

In red. In black.

"...You... Only... you..."

Tomonori groaned with inaudible voice that almost faded away. Piercing the grotesque sword in the middle of the fountain, he tried to raise the body which was full of wounds.

Hihi'irokane, the family treasure that had been taken without permission. Everything was done to kill Kazuma. Until it was accomplished, he couldn't afford to fall.

Still... that thought was also in vain. Tomonori's body lost its strength and once more sank in the middle of the dark red pool of blood.

Aiming at the body that had used all its strength, Kazuma mercilessly gave it kicks using the hard leather shoes.

"Don't... SCREW AROUND! HUUH!?"

Along with dull sound, Tomonori's body was trembling in shock. Suddenly, the spilled blood spread even more on the floor; it soaked Kazuma's shoes.

With the stained shoes, Kazuma repeatedly kicked the beastkin's body. The toe gouged the wound's openings, making wretched noises.

"Hey, what's wrong lil' cat!? Can't stand? Oh, you can't stand anymore? I'm still standing straight though. Hey hey, didn't you say you want to kill me!?"

Tomonori shook the tip of his nose in fury and disgrace. With cloudy pair of eyes, he glared at Terumi. Those eyes still hadn't parted with killing intent, but his body couldn't move

again even for a bit.

The feeling of helplessness excited Kazuma.

"Hyahahaha. Wow, that looks sure are nice. You hate me? Want to kill me? Hate me more! Hatehatehatehatehatehate! Scream you want to kill me!"

As resentment burned his loud laughter, Kazuma trampled Tomonori's back especially violent. The bursting noise had a strong smell of iron.

Furthermore, Kazuma held his hands out toward the motionless Tomonori. Countless shadows of serpent appeared from Kazuma's feet. With the vigor as if swarming a bait, they ate into Tomonori.

Moreover, he kicked many, many times... Then Kazuma unexpectedly lost his balance and took several steps back and took a breath in a sudden.

"Haa, haa, ha...ku, gu... cough..."

Large quantity of blood spilled again from the wound on his stomach and fell onto the floor. With disturbed breathing, his throat became jarred and his body shivered.

"Dammit... Seriously... Don't mess with me... you shitty cat."

Despite Kazuma's shout, the room in the deepest part of the Cathedral was quiet.

The person who stood on the blood-stained floor was Kazuma alone.

Beside him, there was only Tomonori who remained collapsed on the floor.

There was no sighting of Terumi.

He never disappeared. From the beginning, Terumi never existed in this place.

Kazuma was the body. Terumi was the spirit. If so, then the one who had physical form was Kazuma.

It had always been like that. It had always been from the time Kazuma first met Terumi. Kazuma was the only one who had physical form. Terumi and Kazuma's consciousness had fused. Even when they rebuked Tomonori by turns a while ago, it was only Kazuma who stood there in reality.

Kazuma started to walk by dragging his body. A part of the blood-stained shoes made stiff noises as he treaded the particularly cold floor.

If he kept being here, eventually someone might notice anything strange and send over the Ten Sages. He couldn't afford to face the Ten Sages in this condition. He had to flee quickly.

Tomonori didn't move. He was dead.

After resentfully giving him a glance, Kazuma reached his hand to the hall's entrance. The white jacket of the academy's uniform and the pale, thin arm extending from there were wet and stained with something sticky.

His feet were staggering. He could die. It was a serious matter.

Would the thing he had finally obtained, the thing that had returned just simply be gone?

This place was no more than a stopping point of the long, long history.

But before Kazuma could get out of the hall, a shadow even

taller than himself appeared.

"Wha..."

The appearance was unexpected. It was a miscalculation.

Kazuma clicked his tongue.

In front of the elevator, stood a figure of man wearing first-class butler suit that didn't feel appropriate with Mage's Guild. It was a muscular man with long hair tied on his back.

No sooner after he saw Kazuma, he put himself on guard and glared at Kazuma with golden eyes similar to that of a beast.

A man Kazuma... no, Terumi knew.

"Bastard... Valkenhayn..."

Valkenhayn. The werewolf who was serving as Clavis Alucard's butler and had been living for a thousand years.

Immediately after Terumi said his name, Valkenhayn moved. Lowering his tall figure, he strike ahead.

Even though it was a speed lesser than Tomonori's, Kazuma couldn't handle it right now.

The heavy attack hit the thin chest, then his temple felt the strong grip as it grabbed his skull. Following it, the back of his head was knocked onto the solid wall.

The noise of crack running on the stone wall drowned the voice Kazuma let out. Strength left his whole body. The flowing blood smeared his clothes severely.

"Damn... it..."

After the trembled lips could only say that much...

Like a doll losing its support, KazumaTerumi fell down on the floor.

Part 5

Later that night, Trinity woke up in the dormitory room.

Presently in the room, there was Nine who looked about to cry.

It seemed one of the students who had come to academy by chance discovered Trinity when she was collapsed on the corridor. Nine explained that she was taken to infirmary before carried to the dormitory room later. The doctor said that her body had taken a blow, but fortunately there was no injury that could render her unable to move. She also heard that from Nine.

"...The seithr in the city has been disposed. As for the barrier's restoration, it's only a simple measure but it was finished. The genuine restoration will be carried out starting tomorrow. Although I said that, it was just finished a little while ago."

Sitting on a chair beside the bed with legs crossed, Nine continued to explain the situation while feeling relief from the bottom of her heart as there was no issue with Trinity's consciousness.

Trinity laid down on the bed and looked up at her close friend as she listened to her explanation.

"Now... What time... is it?"

Trinity's regular slow tone of voice was even slower; partly because her condition wasn't good.

Without urging her, Nine listened until the end and then looked at a clock above desk.

"It's midnight... Well past over 2."

"You've worked that late..."

"It didn't take until morning, so it's good."

"Don't take Ten Sages lightly," said Nine as she shut her right eye after saying that only.

Inside the soft bedding, Trinity slightly smiled.

"Even though you're tired, you still came here... I'm sorry~."

"Stupid. It's natural. ...I can't help it until I know what happened with you."

In Nine's smile, a sad gloom seeped.

For Nine, Celica and Trinity were special.

It was the same for Trinity. That was why she currently truly felt sorry for giving Nine worries.

Or so as she thought.

But as she couldn't help questioning, Trinity gently asked.

"...How about Kazuma-san?"

Tension ran in Nine's face. Trinity could guess why.

After a while passed, Nine indifferently answered while choosing her words.

"He disappeared. There were signs of that man entering the Cathedral. In the deepest room... marks of struggle were found. But no one was there."

"...I see."

Trinity couldn't hide her dejection.

She vaguely felt that it would turn out this way. If she were asked since when, Trinity herself didn't know.

From the front side, Nine looked into her best friend's eyes that were clouded with sadness. She put her hands on Trinity's feeble white hands.

"Regarding that man... Let's stop thinking about him. As of now, we wouldn't be able to do anything."

Who on earth was that man? It was the question Trinity and Nine had always embraced.

He had a truly dangerous impression.

Nine might have been fearing that that danger would engulf its surroundings.

Trinity might have been fearing that that danger would hurt Kazuma.

In the end, Nine's hunch became realized.

Trinity tried to look straight at Nine as much as she could and nodded. She didn't want to give further worries to Nine, especially with what she had said.

But just a few words.

"Nine. Even then... the time spent together with Kazuma-san... Everything of it didn't feel like a lie to me. He..."

Every morning, He would greet her. It was just sometimes, but he spoke with a truly gentle voice.

The feeling of warmth also existed.

Soon, the night would be late.

Since the Mage's Guild had calmed down for a bit, Nine said that she was going to go searching for Celica who had left the island.

Trinity promised to go with her.

In the corner of her heart... she wondered if she could grasp something related to Kazuma's whereabouts within the vast world, faintly hoping for it.

The castle where night stood for eternity... The Alucard family's castle.

Tonight, the silver moon also decorated the lasting eternal night sky. It gently illuminated the ivy-covered old castle and a vast abandoned garden.

In the basement of the castle where moonlight couldn't reach, there were Valkenhayn along with his master Clavis.

"Is it truly okay to not killing him?"

The vicinity was dark without any existence at all. As light of magic lit an antique lantern, emerged certain figures on the long, continuous hallway.

There was a room at the end of the hallway. It was a small room made of old timber that somewhat ill-matched with the solid stone of the old castle.

Inside the room, a tall young man wearing blood-stained white

jacket, black pants, and a waist-length mantle was tied by magical chains. He might be unconscious as there was no strength in his body.

"...We cannot kill that man. If we intervene, he would once more left the flesh and disappeared somewhere."

Gazing at the motionless thin young man who remained sitting inside the wooden room, Clavis grievously spoke.

"...We are powerless."

Thus, a jail was created. He couldn't do anything but put a secure lock to prevent the beast from getting outside.

After Valkenhayn closed the door, Clavis raised his wrinkled fingers and drew a pattern midair. As the ancient words turned into bindings, the drawn pattern clung onto the door and sealed the thin wood board.

A secure seal that Clavis could handle.

"Now... We should mourn for Tomonori."

Shifting his gaze, Clavis looked at Valkenhayn.

Valkenhayn lightly bowed.

"Why did Tomonori... do as far as carrying Hihi'irokane and selfishly..."

There was an obvious regret in Valkenhayn's mutter.

That time when Tomonori went to the underground of the Cathedral was all done by his own judgment.

When he thought about it, it also made Clavis somewhat succumbed into regret.

If only he had noticed it sooner and made Tomonori return. Or possibly, if he could send Valkenhayn directly sooner, then... The friend who had unyielding stubbornness as if a single swing of sword might not lose his life.

"...It seems he could not resist. He thought that there are things only he can do. A man who could not help but to accomplish it"

Clavis' answered with sigh mixed within before lowering his eyelids.

"Let us go, Valkenhayn. We have something to achieve... Just like him."

"...Understood, Clavis-sama."

Turning his back on the sealed door, Valkenhayn pushed Clavis' wheelchair and returned to the hallway.

Each time they advanced, doors were closed as if shutting down the inner part. Every single one of them was also sealed by Clavis.

Listening to the sound of the last door at the end of the hallway being closed, Valkenhayn strongly thought that those doors might never be opened again.

And deep, deep, deep, deep in the dark.

Within the locked seal.

A young man who was trapped alone laughed loudly.

He ignored the pain of his wounds and distress from the binding. Rather than despairing for the circumstances, he seemed to hold hopes for a promising future.

"HYAAHAHAHAHA. The countdown's commencing, senile bloodsucker! When you die, I'll get out from here... You'll realize the real beginning started from there after you kicked the bucket. HYAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Within the cold seal.

He continued to laugh in ecstasy indefinitely.

Epilogue

December, 2106 AD——.

Six years ago, a demon called Black Beast appeared all of a sudden. Because of it, the world collapsed world, losing its order and balance. It also lost the usual climate along with seasons.

It was also true for today. Despite that December was about to end, the coolness of weather was as if it was autumn. Presently, it was unlikely for thick clothes to soon take their turn.

It was a fine early afternoon as clouds were many, but didn't

obstruct the sunlight. Among a forest in mountain, a girl was wandering around.

White tunic, black pleated skirt, and a long mantle to match the skirt. The long tawny hair was tied on high position, making a ponytail. The eyes that had the color of wet soil didn't have any confusion as they were only gazing at the front. She advanced forward and forward, walking unhesitatingly. But where she was walking was a path without traces of animals. It was a completely trackless path.

The girl's name was Celica A. Mercury.

She had secretly rushed out from an island where she lived together with her sister, heading to a country called Japan which was ruined six years ago.

If she went there, she might met her long lost father. While embracing such expectation, she was currently aiming to go to a harbor where the only boat which would head to Japan existed.

But the road to the harbor was unexpectedly steep. From what she listened at the hotel last night, no one ever said about entering a mountain.

"I'm sure when I get out of this forest, I should be able to see a large road. Okay, I'll do my best."

While making her way up to cross the root of a thick tree, Celica continued on and on without getting discouraged by the forest's sceneries and cheered her bright self.

It was a wonder if her feelings had reached the forest as the field of vision on the path gradually opened up. Celica noticed it immediately and a smile bloomed like flower.

Delighted, she spontaneously made her pace faster. After

getting out, she would first search for a place to sit and rest.

But after she put a single step out of the forest, Celica stopped.

It was a white-haired young man wearing a stunning bright red jacket.

His age was a little older than Celica's. Judging from his tall appearances, he had a well-proportioned figure. Besides that, something might have happened as there were serious injuries all over him.

"Oh no...!"

Flustered, Celica went around the young man so as to block the sunlight.

There was breathing in his chest. His complexion wasn't so pale that he might lose his life. However, that was because the young man had quite a physical strength. If it got exhausted...

It might be because he had noticed Celica's shadow since the young man's eyelids moved slightly, opening his weak eye. It was a green eye. A stern but also gentle color.

Thank god, it's faint but he's conscious. First of all I'll heal the big wounds, and then he must take a good rest.

Celica smiled and spoke to give encouragement.

"Umm, hang on please. ...Are you all right?"

In the dark times with uncertain tomorrow.

In the day with unstable climates as winter wouldn't seem to

appear.

In the moment the gear of fate began to turn suddenly.

Celica met him.

Afterword

...This is reality.

I'm aware I was drawing a scenery I've never seen before.

Dragging my muddy consciousness, I collapsed on the bed. I got up a few hours later and gave a hit on the keyboard sitting in front of a square window. I don't know how many times I have repeated that cycle.

I pictured the situation with a mind so fuzzy that it felt like I'm dreaming. My fingers somehow turned the pictures into words. But it was too slow to make any progress. Before long, the promised date passed...

The result was satisfactory. I thought that it would do. I felt that I could do it if I tried. At least, it was a beautiful sight for myself.

But the next day. He spoke in the small window of Skype.

"I didn't really get this. Can you fix it?"

——And just like that, the six chapters of the script became to this state.

I have learned something. Writing things using only the influence of unclear thinking pattern would make it nonsensical. Like writing the contents of a dream. And then I only noticed it after being pointed out by another person.

For the readers from the previous volume BlazBlue Phase 0, long time no see. For the readers who just picked the book for the first time, nice to meet you. Hello, my name is Komao Mako and I'm the author.

The farce at the beginning was an act after I finished writing the first draft. I might exaggerate a bit when I said that the supervisor, Mori Producer, disagreed with me and told me to do a whole retake, even though I'm sure I have nailed it.

The so called situation of 'the only person who understands it is the writer'. I never imagined for the day where I strongly guilty of it to arrive. Thank you for pointing it out, Mori-san and the editor.

Let's set the long introduction aside.

You might have guessed after seeing it the first time, but this book, BlazBlue Phase Shift 1, is the novelization of the 2D competitive fighting game BlazBlue which was released by Arc System Works corporation. Also, the novelization now has two volumes.

By the way, the original BlazBlue's recent release, Continuum Shift II, is super popular of being played in game centers! It can be played recently on PSP and 3DS, too.

Even if it's only a portable console, the graphic's really clear. The reward from reading the scenario is upgraded even more. Although it's only hand-sized, you will still get excited enough. But getting carelessly immersed during travelling will make you keep passing your stops often, so be careful. It's a bitter memory.

Also if you can enjoy it together with the first novel BlazBlue Phase 0, I'd be truly grateful.

Aah, this second book makes me exhilarated.

If the first book's popular, then a second book will also... That kind of talk was frequently mentioned, but to think that it was realized. Even now, the happiness made my feet feel light.

Furthermore, did the front cover give you a vague hint about the leading man?

Oh, just what am I hiding? I also really liked that green-haired man.

From the beginning, I more or less was full of 'Oh gosh I'm going to write about him' kind of unpleasant excitement. But as for the green man... I wonder if he has a fairly characteristic way of speaking.

I wrote and wrote, but the circumstances were astonishing like 'it's different, not like this...'. To tell you the truth, each time the green man started to talk at the second half, it'd give me a headache. Just what's with that person?

There were many tiresome things, but it was sooo fun to write various kinds of the green man.

In the middle of writing, I thought that no way it's gonna end in my lifetime. But now, writing plenty of that man... left a clean aftertaste.

But it took many hours... I really felt guilty toward everyone in the staff. I'll do an introspection. Really.

Have you seen the contents yet? What do you think?

Unlike BlazBlue's original work, it was school-themed. Personally, it felt fresh and interesting, but my heart pounds when thinking about how it will come out for the original BlazBlue's fans. I hope you'd find it fun.

...Well then. It's just a routine but since I think this would be the place to say thanks again, I'd like to give a few words of gratitude.

To the editor in charge who gave me encouragement, sometimes fiercely. And to Arc System Works' PR Mineshima-san who told all kinds of inside stories and always being cheerful when we met. I give my deepest gratitude to the two of you. Both of you always reminded me to have fun.

Also to Katou-san who had drawn the illustrations. I'm sorry for the terrible schedule even though you're already busy. And thanks to you, too. I treasure the rough illustrations I stole and brought home.

And then to the producer, Mori-san. Thank you very much! I'm happy that I could write this novel! You were harsh when I couldn't write good enough, but it's really enjoyable!

The last one of course is to everyone who bought this book. In other words, you. Thank you very much. I hope you will look forward to me again after this. Please enjoy the world of BlazBlue to the fullest!

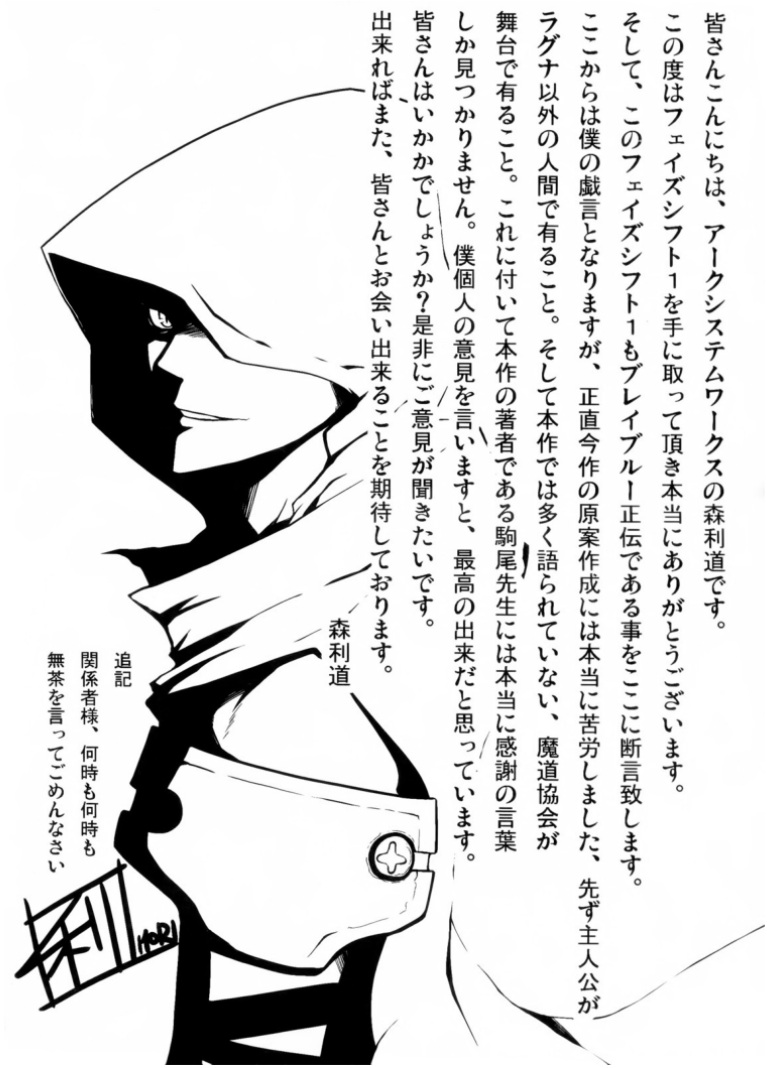
~Komao Mako

Congratulations on the second novel of BlazBlue!

This is Katou. I was in charge of the illustration for this time, too.

I'm kinda like doing monochrome illustrations, so this time I got to draw them again. Since I couldn't draw many monochrome illustrations in the game, it was enjoyable for me.

Komao-sama and the editor also did a good job this time.



Hello everyone, this is Mori Shinichi from Arc System Works.

On this occasion, I'd like to thank you for picking up Phase Shift 1.

I confirm here that this Phase Shift is also a life story of BlazBlue.

Starting here is just my nonsense, but honestly, I had a hard

time with the original draft for the work this time. First, the protagonist was someone other than Ragna. Then something that I hadn't been told much, about Mage's Guild being the setting. I just can't find enough gratitude for the author involved in this book, Komao-sensei. In my personal opinion, the book came out amazing.

How about all of you? I want to hear your opinion by all means.

If possible, I hope we will be able to meet.

~Mori Shinichi

PS:

For all the staff, I'm sorry for always, always saying absurd things.